

**Security Council**Distr.: General
30 June 2021

Original: English

Letter dated 30 June 2021 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 enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by the Secretary-General, António Guterres, Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), Forest Whitaker, Advocate for Children Affected by War with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Laban Onisimus, Education Specialist, Plan International Nigeria, as well as the statements delivered by Kersti Kaljulaid, President of Estonia, Mohamed Bazoum, President of the Niger, Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Permanent Representative of the United States of America and Member of the Cabinet of President Biden, Jens Frølich Holte, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Keisal M. Peters, Minister of State with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary of India, Dang Hoang Giang, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, and James Cleverly, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as by the representatives of China, France, Kenya, Mexico, the Russian Federation and Tunisia, in connection with the videoconference on "Children and armed conflict" convened on Monday, 28 June 2021.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for this videoconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, the European Union, Fiji, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council ([S/2020/372](#)), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, these briefings and statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
President of the Security Council



Annex I

Briefing by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres

I thank the Government of Estonia for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict.

Conflict devastates societies and hits children particularly hard.

The start of 2021 has been no exception and, although monitoring of violations against children committed during 2021 will not be reported until my report of next year, I call on all parties to conflict to prioritize the prevention of violations against children and to engage in dialogue, ceasefires and peace processes.

During 2020, almost 24,000 grave violations were committed against 19,300 children in the 21 situations covered by this mandate. The disregard for children's rights at times of conflict and upheaval is shocking and heartbreaking.

The most prevalent verified violations continued to be the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, and the denial of humanitarian access to children.

Moreover, new and deeply concerning trends emerged: an exponential increase in the number of children abducted, and in sexual violence against boys and girls.

We are also seeing schools and hospitals, constantly attacked, looted, destroyed or used for military purposes, with girls' educational and health facilities targeted disproportionately.

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict mandate, its continued relevance is sadly clear and it remains a proven tool for protecting the world's children.

My Special Representative and the United Nations on the ground, along with civil society and other partners, are fully mobilized to better protect children and to prevent violations against them from occurring in the first place.

To do this, they use all available tools put in place by this Council's 13 resolutions on ending and preventing violations against children.

They monitor and document violations, engage with parties to conflict and develop action plans and commitments.

They advocate for the release of children, provide technical and capacity-building assistance, and support this Council's working group on children and armed conflict.

The annual report, with its accountability and engagement components, is a crucial instrument.

As a result, 17 action plans are being implemented and at least 35 new commitments were made by parties to conflict during 2020. Last year alone, more than 12,300 children were released.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added new dimensions to this vital work – and new stresses. I salute the dedication and professionalism of United Nations staff and partners, who adapted swiftly to support host countries in the pandemic response and ensure the continued monitoring of violations while engaging with conflict parties on behalf of children. I cannot stress enough the need to fund child protection positions in the field, as our ability to protect children rests on the presence of such staff.

There are many challenges to be overcome if we aim to better protect children and prevent violations against them in the years to come.

This agenda is central to conflict resolution and prevention. As armed conflicts evolve and as children face multiple threats, the framework for the protection of children must also adapt. We need to ensure the inclusion of child protection language in peace processes, and to enhance data analysis, early warning and advocacy for early action.

The report now before us is grim.

But we can also draw hope from the local and international commitments to this work; from the efforts of our child protection specialists; and, most importantly, in hearing the voice of the children behind the numbers.

I applaud the young people, who, after enduring so much trauma and pain, still stand up for, and help, others.

We need to elevate children's voices and best interests in peace processes and political decision-making. Last year, Member States asked me to develop a vision to better address current and future challenges to advance our common agenda; now children, youth and future generations must be an important part of this effort and I will do everything possible to highlight this aspect.

I call on the Security Council and all Member States to strongly support the protection of children in all ways at all times.

There is no place for children in conflict, and we must not allow conflict to trample on the rights of children.

Annex II

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

UNICEF thanks President Kaljulaid for convening this debate – and for Estonia's continued support to children affected by armed conflict. And we thank the Secretary-General and Special Representative Gamba for their ongoing commitment to protect these young lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for children around the world. But especially for the children living through the horrors of conflict. For the children living through the 21 conflicts outlined in the report, the challenges of daily life under COVID-19 are magnified. School closures. Increased risks of violence and abuse under lockdowns. Mental health impacts and being separated from their friends and peers. Negative coping mechanisms like child marriage and child labour. All against the backdrop of protracted conflicts and a global socio-economic crisis that threatens to roll back decades of progress and increase the risk of recruitment and use of children.

We had hoped that parties to conflict would turn their attention from fighting each other, to fighting the virus. That's why UNICEF joined the Secretary-General in calling for a global ceasefire. Sadly, as this annual report shows, this call went unheeded. Parties to conflict did not lay down their arms. They did not stop fighting. They did not allow a sufficient level of humanitarian access so our agencies and partners can reach these children in need. And lockdowns and travel constraints made the already challenging work of supporting these children all the more difficult. Affecting our ability to reach children with lifesaving support. Constraining our work to release children from the ranks of armed groups. And slowing our efforts to trace and reunify children with their families and begin the long process of reintegration.

The children trapped within these emergencies paid a high price. The United Nations verified grave violations against over 19,000 children in humanitarian situations last year, many of whom were subjected to more than one violation of their rights. Thousands of children killed or maimed. Recruited and used in the fighting. Abducted, sexually abused and exploited. On average, over the last five years, the United Nations has verified at least 70 children every day who experienced grave rights violations. The actual numbers are much higher. Each case is another sad addition to the more than one-quarter million violations recorded since the monitoring mechanism began.

While our agencies are doing all that we can to prevent these violations and protect children, we urgently need the support of Member States, partners and the Council in four key areas.

First – we urge the Council to give this issue the priority it deserves in its decisions and deliberations. Surely, if there is one priority around which all States can rally behind, it must be the protection of children. And despite political differences, the Council has managed to shape an overall framework for compliance with international law and accountability to end these violations – including through the resolutions, statements, and the Working Group dedicated to this issue. We urge the Council to continue placing this issue at the centre of its peace and security work every day, and to support our call to all Member States to endorse and implement the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration.

Second – we call on States and on all parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Last year, explosive weapons and remnants of war were responsible for nearly half of all verified child casualties. They were used to attack schools, hospitals, and water and sanitation facilities. All of the vital systems

upon which people depend. All vital to preventing epidemics, hunger and disease and specifically critical for children. And they are a huge driver of displacement – causing children and families to flee their homes because of the constant danger.

We call on all Member States to follow the lead of Ireland and others and make an unequivocal political commitment to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Doing so would have an immediate and positive effect on the safety and futures of millions of children living through conflict and post-conflict.

Third – we call on Member States to invest in women and girls and prevent gender-based violence in conflict. The report of the Secretary-General shows a staggering increase in verified cases of rape, sexual violence and abduction. Girls were not only the victims of one-quarter of all violations – they represented 98 per cent of the victims of rape and sexual violence.

While our organizations are doing all we can to prevent and respond to these horrifying violations against girls, we need Member States to take all action possible, including to dramatically increase investment in the capacities of frontline responders – especially women and girl-led organizations.

And fourth – we call on Member States to help us increase child protection capacity across the board. We thank Estonia for highlighting this issue, in particular. Because without increased investment and capacity, UNICEF and our United Nations and NGO partners cannot document cases, engage with parties to conflict, or support children and families to the extent needed. Many frontline workers put their lives on the line to support these children ... to listen to and document their experiences ... and to carry these findings back to the world – and to the Council – so we can shape our responses accordingly.

This work is absolutely critical to negotiating and implementing the action plans supported by the United Nations – now 17 in total. And it gives United Nations leadership and child protection staff the information and data they need to respond. From providing prosthetics to children who have lost limbs. To reuniting children with their families. To reintegrating children into their communities with mental health support. To counselling girls who have been raped, so they can deal with the trauma they've endured. We need Member States to bolster this vital, lifesaving work by supporting the frontline workers who risk their lives to do it, each and every day.

Council Members – this new report demonstrates how far we've come in understanding the devastating impact conflicts have on children. But it also shows how little progress the world has made in protecting children from the scourge of war since Graca Machel's groundbreaking report 25 years ago.

Conflicts are longer. They are increasingly complex. And the impacts on children and young people continue to devastate futures. Each violation against children – reported or unreported – represents a stain on our humanity. And on our ability, as a world, to fulfil a basic function – to protect and care for the youngest and most vulnerable people in our world. And to match their bravery and resilience with our best efforts. Children and young people bear no responsibility for conflict. And yet they bear the deepest scars. They pay the highest price.

Through decisive political action and increased investment in the humanitarian heroes who are supporting these young lives in the midst of violence and war, we can begin to turn this around – through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF stands ready to support these efforts in any way we can, and we will continue working with partners like Estonia to shine a light on this issue.

Annex III

Briefing by the Advocate for Children Affected by War with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Forest Whitaker

I would like to personally thank Mrs. Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia and Chair of the Council. My recognition goes also to Mr. Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and his Special Representative, Mrs. Gamba, for their dedication in addressing the fates of children and adolescents affected by conflict.

This is the second time that I have had the honour of addressing the Security Council on the issue and it is encouraging to observe that the momentum behind this issue has grown stronger. Indeed, lasting peace, which constitutes the core mission of this institution, is at stake when children are subject to the six grave violations that the Secretary-General detailed in his report. Each of these violations is chilling, whether it is the killing and maiming of children; the recruitment or use of children as soldiers; sexual violence against children; abduction of children; attacks against schools or hospitals; or the denial of humanitarian access to children.

These violations also have invisible impacts that last much longer than the violations themselves. I see at least three of them. First of all, these children lose months or years of education.

Such gaps will turn into jeopardized careers and reduced opportunities. And, in many cases, their opportunities will be also limited because of a second invisible impact of the grave violations, social stigma. Their families and communities often refuse to take them back or care for them. Many will end up on the streets or join gangs. Stigma is one of the most recurring issues in the discussions I have with the former child soldiers who join my organization, like Auma Susan. She is 24 today as Female Youth Counsellor of her town. A respected community leader, she teaches peace education in schools and mediates land disputes. But her childhood is a story of depravation and grief. Auma was abducted by the LRA on her way to school when she was seven. For three months, she was forced to cook, fetch water, and babysit. She was regularly beaten and could escape only after taking shrapnel in a leg. But her suffering was not over. For years, people rejected her and called her names – adding insult to injury. For years, before she could rebound and thrive, her whole life was defined by stigma.

For Auma and so many former child soldiers, stigma dramatically aggravated the effects of a third invisible impact, trauma. Not all children involved in conflict will suffer from wounds and injuries – but all will suffer from inner scars, trapped in inner cages for which they have no key.

During my time in Uganda, I met an aid worker from Denmark at a football match played by former child soldiers who had become refugees and students. The aid worker was sitting next to me and seemed like he was carrying a profound sadness.

He told me he had started a program for some of the players, to return the child soldiers whose families were still alive back to their homes. The night before this game, he had placed the first boy back into his childhood home with his family.

The aid worker's eyes filled with tears as he told me that once this boy returned home, he killed his eight-year old sister. The boy's brain had been transformed to only know violence. He'd been freed from the war but had yet to be freed from his own mind.

This story reminds us that children affected by conflict cannot walk out of their night in a day. Reintegration will not succeed without patience and determination. We need to offer them a continuum of care that will span childhood, adolescence, and youth, addressing their needs in terms of education, economic opportunities and psychosocial support.

I have worked at this for the past decade through my foundation, the Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI), in South Sudan, Uganda, and other countries. We work to rekindle the link between children affected by conflict and their community, providing them skills, opportunities, and trauma healing. We are not alone in this effort. Other organizations are working in the same direction. I can think of my friend Sam Okello, one of the first former child soldiers I came to meet, who created a campus, Hope North, to provide shelter and skills to children and youth affected by conflict. I could name another figure, Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe and the orphanage she runs in Gulu to teach tailoring to girls rescued from armed groups. Larger institutions are very active across different continents, like War Child with their programmes around the world.

Our approaches and resources may be different, but we share the conviction that seen as real people whose capacity for resilience can be nurtured with unique benefits for the community.

They have the right to a second chance. This is what Benson, a WPDI volunteer from Northern Uganda told me. Benson Lugwar was abducted in 2004 at the age of eight by the LRA in a raid that killed his parents and siblings. For two years, he was forced to witness and commit acts of violence, including during the infamous Lira massacre in a camp of internally displaced persons. His trials forged him and, despite what we may expect, they gave him the will to become a change-maker, a peacebuilder. “Never again” became his motto: he did not want other children to go through the same ordeal as he did. When he enrolled with us, in 2017, we took this energy and trained him for over a year to develop the skills and the confidence he needed to fulfil his dreams. After years implementing projects at our side, Benson has become a respected figure in his community. He has created a business, mediated conflicts and informed populations on such issues as Gender-Based Violence or, more recently, COVID-19. He hosts a weekly radio talk show and has recently been elected in an official position. Benson recently told us of his journey with us and I want to quote him because his words fully capture the reason why we are gathered today: “I did not lose sight because the seeds of hope were planted and nurtured in me. From being a former child soldier to a role model that influences many youths within my community and outside.”

These are the words of a young man who, like many children and youths affected by conflict, has been sacrificed and traumatized, children and youths that society too often stigmatizes and marginalizes. Yet, here they come to us with a message of hope and resilience. And they ask simple questions of us and the members of this assembly: Will you take the time to listen to us? Will you have the strength to see the positive in us?

Annex IV

Briefing by the Education Specialist of Plan International Nigeria, Laban Onisimus

I thank the President for inviting Plan International to give a briefing on children in armed conflict with a specific focus on girls' lived realities.

My name is Laban Onisimus. I work for Plan International as an Education Specialist in Nigeria, leading teams in humanitarian operations in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria focusing on gender-responsive child protection and education in crises.

In my three years working for Plan International I have witnessed the protracted crisis in the Lake Chad Basin take its toll on the 17 million people living in the region. It has affected countless lives, causing death, destruction, fear, vulnerability, insecurity – needless human suffering. It remains one of the most severe humanitarian emergencies in the world, spanning parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, not forgetting the crisis in the Sahel region – Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as the ongoing and neglected conflict in Northwest Southwest Cameroon.

The impact on children, and on girls' lives, has been catastrophic. In 2020 alone, the Secretary-General has reported the killing and maiming of 124 children, including 39 girls in Nigeria. The United Nations has verified that these atrocities were carried out by state and non-State armed groups. This is the tip of the iceberg: we believe that these numbers are much higher.

I will be speaking today on the specific impact of grave violations against children in armed conflict, in particular on girls.

Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#) was the first resolution on children and armed conflict to acknowledge the specific needs and vulnerabilities of both girls and boys, but we have a long way to go to recognize, understand, and address the experiences of girls in armed conflict who are subjected to all six of the grave violations. In the Lake Chad Basin, girls are being specifically targeted in attacks, and we are seeing an exponential growth in violations against girls, who make up 50 per cent of victims. I am here today to call upon the Security Council to increase efforts to protect girls, who are on the frontlines of these attacks.

Abduction of children

The attacks on girls were brought to global attention following the abduction of 276 girls in Chibok in 2014. As I speak today, some of these girls are yet to return home. Some parents have died while waiting for their children to return. Most abductions do not make international news, and the number of abducted girls is in fact much higher.

There has been some positive response on the side of the Government – including endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, and hosting the Safe Schools conference later this year in October. But more needs to be done to domesticate the framework at the community level – I believe that will go a long way in helping us to address the problem holistically.

Sexual violence against girls

2020 saw an alarming 70 per cent rise in rape and other forms of sexual violence compared to the previous year in countries on the children and armed conflict agenda, with girls comprising 98 per cent of all victims. We are horrified to hear this large increase, which is still likely far lower than the true number.

Having worked directly with victims of sexual violence I can attest to the physical and mental health consequences and trauma faced by survivors, who often do not have access to adequate healthcare, an issue that has severely worsened due to targeted attacks on healthcare facilities.

Girls' traumatic experiences together with stigma impact their ability to pursue their education and move on with their lives in other important ways.

Attacks against schools

Thousands of adolescent girls have been denied their right to education and a dignified life because of this 11 year crisis, a root cause of which is hostility toward secular education, with repeated attacks on schools, universities, teachers, administrators, and students. 2,295 teachers have been killed trying to protect children's lives and their right to education. More than 1,400 schools have been destroyed. And to date more than 600,000 children have lost access to education.

I have personally supervised the rebuilding of several blocks of classrooms that have been destroyed as a result of the crisis and have repeatedly seen these being destroyed and burned down by armed groups.

Schools should be places of safety, and no child should have to choose between their education and their life – but schools are now a soft target and schools for girls are especially targeted as a tactic of war.

Permit me to read a quote from one of the girls that has regained her freedom after an attack on her school.

“After the attack, I told my parents I would never go back to school. Before the attack, I was so passionate to study and achieve my dream of being a lawyer. But now, this experience has completely demoralized me I told my father that I will never go back because of threats and what I saw that night”.

Recruitment and use of girls

In Northern Nigeria girls are targeted by armed groups for use as suicide bombers. Between June 2014 and February 2018, about 468 women and girls have been deployed or arrested in 240 suicide attacks, the most any terrorist movement has used – killing roughly 1,200 and injuring some 3,000.

Almost all the female suicide bombers are adolescent girls who have often been influenced or forced to carry out these attacks.

Denial (delay and diversion) of humanitarian access

In Northeast Nigeria, humanitarian hubs have also been deliberately attacked. The denial of humanitarian access disproportionately impacts girls and women, who comprise the majority of those in need of humanitarian assistance in the Lake Chad region. Gender inequalities shape and influence vulnerabilities in times of crisis – with adolescent girls affected in distinct ways. There are clear connections between food insecurity, child and forced marriage and disruptions to the right to education. Yet in spite of this, girls are mostly not consulted in decision-making to ensure that humanitarian response is meeting their needs. The outright denial of humanitarian access – including through blockages or direct attacks only worsens their situation.

Our recommendations to the Security Council and the international community

Despite the challenges they face, adolescent girls in the Lake Chad region and all of the countries where we operate demonstrate resilience, entrepreneurial skills, a commitment to hard work, a desire to help others, optimism for the future – attributes

essential for any society if it hopes to transition towards a peaceful, prosperous and secure future.

Plan International is calling on the Security Council and the international community to:

- Recognize and take immediate steps to address the fact that girls are being specifically targeted in conflict, and are subjected to all six grave violations against children in armed conflict.
- Address the use of girls as a weapon of war. Girls associated with armed forces and armed groups have unique experiences, face specific risks, and must be included in the design of gender and age-sensitive programmes and policy.
- Demand and pursue accountability for all those who target and attack schools, kill and maim students and teachers, and abduct girls, ensuring all parties to conflict fulfil their obligations under international law.
- Help us to make the safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to children a reality, by allowing humanitarian access and humanitarian personnel to do our important and life-saving work.
- Lastly, the Security Council, Member States, and the United Nations must do better in conflict prevention. Conflicts today that could have been prevented or cut short are lasting for years. We urge the Council to uphold its commitment to mainstream child protection in conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict situations with the aim of sustaining peace and preventing conflict.

Children and adolescent girls deserve to survive, to recover, and to have their youth full of safety, stability, and hope. They will one day lead our world and we owe it to them to give them a chance. We must not fail them.

Annex V

Statement by the President of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid

First of all, I would like to thank all our briefers for their clear, urgent and deeply moving messages.

A girl – her name is Graciela – was born in a small mining town in the Central African Republic. Her mother died when she was just a baby. And she also lost her father, when a rebel group attacked her hometown in 2014. She fled, but encountered another armed group on the road and had no choice but to join them. She had to cook for the group, but also train to fight. She hated that.

Fortunately by now, she has been able to start a new life. After being denied access to education for a long time, she was able to go back to school. This has been a success story.

But what would have this story been like during a pandemic? How has the pandemic affected numerous children in situations like these since spring 2020? These are complex, uncomfortable, important questions we need to ask ourselves.

As we are discussing the findings of the annual report of the Secretary-General today, I want to encourage us not to display difficult situations better than they actually are. It is humane from us to want to see and search for success and development. But we must be bold enough to admit if we could all learn and do better, taking next steps forward.

In 2020, the situation of children in armed conflict was marked by a sustained high number of grave violations. As the pandemic has roamed on in 2021, we have had to admit that as we've implemented lockdown policies, we have also created challenges that task forces on the ground have needed to overcome to document and verify those violations, and to engage with parties to prevent and end those violations.

Schools and child friendly spaces being closed, families having lost their income, children are an easy target – for example, to be recruited by armed groups, or to be married off, abducted, raped.

The report of 2020 contains an overview of more than 26 000 verified grave violations against children. We can only guess how many violations have gone unnoticed and unreported due to the pandemic.

Despite the work the United Nations and its partners have done, the situation is worsening in many countries. Multitude of children grow up without knowing anything but war – among them, a whole generation in Syria.

The war in Yemen has had serious consequences for children. “The biggest war is to destroy children and the mothers who grieve from them,” said the mother of an 8-year-old Omar. He was wounded on his way home from school and his 13-year-old brother was killed.

Children have been killed by regime forces in Myanmar. And in the first 3 months this year in Afghanistan, more than 150 children were recorded killed and 400 injured – and in just these few weeks, numerous schools have been damaged, preventing thousands of students from returning to classrooms.

As every crisis, hopefully this one has also helped highlight where solutions might be. We need to think how we can use technology better. Even the basic level of mobile connection can help us to register and know where our children are. Only then can we help them.

Education is the key of prevention. Schools must be protected from attack. This means education for girls, but also for boys. Until abduction of girls from schools is also done as an attack against the idea of girls' education, we need to educate boys, future men – brothers and husbands – to think differently from their parents.

A crucial part of prevention is ensuring accountability at the earliest stages possible. We must make sure that no one is above the law. No perpetrator should escape justice. We need strong national accountability measures for grave violations against children and for cooperation with relevant international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court.

All parties must comply with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. A strong monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children is a part of it. We need to recognize here in the Security Council, that the protection of children is relevant for every situation on the Security Council's agenda. It is crucial to ensure, preserve and strengthen the United Nations child protection capacity, including in mission transitions and drawdowns.

In conclusion, I invite us to close this open debate today with at least one actionable item every single individual here will take, and at least one every entity, every country here will take and follow through in the next few weeks to really move us all forward in finding meaningful solutions. Action brings hope of more action.

Estonia – to start with ourselves – will continue funding the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. We will also maintain, as we have until now, a strong focus on the protection of children as a member of the Security Council.

Annex VI

Statement by the President of the Niger, Mohamed Bazoum

[Original: French]

I would like to warmly congratulate Estonia on its presidency of the Security Council. The Niger welcomes Estonia's decision to make the issue of children in armed conflict a priority of its term of office on the Council.

I would like to reiterate my congratulations to Mr. António Guterres on his re-election as Secretary General of the United Nations and to welcome his commitment, and that of Ms. Henrietta Fore and Mr. Whitaker, to the important issue of the protection of children in armed conflict. I also welcome the presentation on this subject made by Mr Onisimus.

The Niger is committed to helping to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. Those children fall victim to the combined effects of humanitarian crises, climate-related security risks and economic insecurity accentuated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Today, conflict-related security and humanitarian crises are fuelling suffering around the world, as more than 79.5 million people have been forcibly displaced, with children the primary victims. It is therefore crucial that we collectively work to build a world of peace where all children can flourish.

Conflicts and security-related and humanitarian crises undermine systems for protecting the most vulnerable, including children. For example, over 26,400 grave violations against children have been recorded in 21 situations.

Approximately 75 million children have had their education disrupted by conflict, violence and insecurity in 35 countries. Owing to the pandemic, access to schools has been interrupted for 168 million people, a fact which has also highlighted the need to close the chasm of inequality between countries with regard to access to digital education.

In the Sahel region in particular, the number of schools closed as a result of the security crisis and attacks on schools by terrorist groups has increased sixfold since 2017, with approximately 5,000 schools closed, disrupting the education of more than 700,000 children and depriving more than 20,000 teachers of the opportunity to practise their profession.

The Niger is also concerned about the particular vulnerabilities of girls in the context of conflict. In countries affected by conflict, girls are half as likely to be enrolled in school as those living in countries at peace. Every school that closes is a door of opportunity that closes.

In the face of this alarming situation of violations against children in armed conflicts, it is essential to develop an appropriate, contextual and sustained response. The Niger is making a formal call for concrete action to protect schools. The statement by the President of the Security Council on protecting schools from attack, adopted last September under the presidency of the Niger ([S/PRST/2020/8](#)), and the Safe Schools Declaration, remain important instruments in this regard.

The protection of children in armed conflict must be approached in a cross-sectoral manner, building on existing regional and national mechanisms. Gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration support programmes, including support for education and training for children and young survivors of armed conflict, are essential.

That is because the process of rebuilding communities and consolidating peace requires a focus on these children and young people, who are at risk of exclusion and social stigmatization, and who are easy targets for terrorist groups that recruit them into their ranks.

Accordingly, the Niger has set up a centre that works closely with communities to ensure successful reintegration, with psychological support, for these distressed children whose only wish is the opportunity to lead a new life.

The current health crisis has already become a crisis of children's rights. When health systems break down on such a scale, so do protection and prevention mechanisms. The suspension of major immunization campaigns could lead to the emergence of preventable diseases affecting children.

The medium- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on violations against children affected by conflict will be devastating if nothing is done. There is a real prospect of an increase in violations, such as child labour, re-recruitment and child marriage and its impact on access to education, especially for young girls who are less likely to return to school after a closure.

In this context, the Niger is calling for the effective implementation of Security Council resolution [2565 \(2021\)](#) in order to facilitate equitable and affordable access to vaccines in situations of armed conflict, post-conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies.

While the current pandemic has challenged our ability to address the grave violations suffered by children in times of armed conflict, it also reminds us that global systemic change, including a change in our child protection efforts, is needed.

I stress the need to integrate child protection into the peace process from the earliest stages, in order to significantly reduce violations against children and create the conditions for sustainable peace.

I would like to emphasize once again access to quality education for all, including girls, and the creation of conditions for the professional development of young people, to enable them to contribute to the development of their country. Education is a pillar of conflict prevention, and in countries experiencing security and humanitarian crises, education is at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts.

We are talking about a collective responsibility for all Member States. This is an essential prerequisite for achieving the peace and security objectives to which the international community aspires.

Annex VII

Statement by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins

May I, first of all, congratulate the President on Estonia's achieving of such a successful presidency of the Council and indeed thank her for organizing today's important debate. We are all, I am sure, grateful for the powerful insights and motivation we have received today from Secretary-General Guterres, Executive Director Fore, Mr. Whitaker and Mr. Onisimus.

I take the opportunity, too, to renew my congratulations to the Secretary-General on his appointment to a second term, director of a global institution that is our best hope for seeing a recognition that global issues require a global response – a response beyond any narrow interests.

While there has hardly been a child that has not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, its impacts are, and have been, heaviest among the least resourced and most vulnerable, and additionally, of course, most severe for children affected by armed conflict.

This Council holds the grave responsibility of vindicating children's rights, protecting them from harm, and holding accountable those responsible for violating the experience of childhood.

We are at an acute crisis as to the future of children. From the Sahel to Syria, Afghanistan to the Horn of Africa, children are bearing the brunt of unspeakable violations. In so many places of war, such as Syria, Palestine and Yemen, children have grown up knowing only war. They have inherited the pain and trauma, as we have heard, of occupation and unresolved conflicts.

In Tigray, Ethiopia, children are facing famine, while girls have been the victims of horrific sexual violence. Rape and sexual assault are the shameful practice of a growing number of military assailants.

Today, may I focus on three specific issues: education, protection and accountability, which I believe are foundational principles for us to advance from this nightmare.

Education

I am sure that we can all agree that it is morally reprehensible that one in every three children living in countries affected by conflict or disaster is out of school.

Rather than their becoming targets, as they are becoming in some conflict areas, schools should be a protected, be a safe shelter and space for learning and development.

The report of the Secretary-General before us shows that parties to conflict are not just continuing to violate such a sanctuary, and that attacks on schools are actually increasing: over 26,000 grave violations were verified by the United Nations in 2020. These included attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of the right to humanitarian access.

There were 101 verified attacks on schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 62 in Afghanistan and 53 in Somalia, to highlight just three countries. 2021 is sadly following the same trend. For example, in just over one week in Gaza, more than 140 educational facilities were bombarded, many left in ruins. In Myanmar, the occupation of schools by the military has compounded an existing learning crisis for almost 12 million children.

The deliberate targeting, the attacks on, and invasion and occupation of schools and hospitals by armed groups are actions that can never be justified. They constitute action that must be brought to an end – and it requires new and urgent action.

Ireland prioritizes access to education in emergencies. We have committed to spend €250 million on global education by 2024, and that is why we are launching the Girls Fund to support grassroots groups led by girls, advancing gender equality in their own communities.

Protection

My second and very related point, is on the issue of Protection.

Last year, more than 8,000 children were killed or maimed in situations of conflict. The United Nations has also verified alarming increases in cases of abduction and sexual violence during 2020. Child protection is of such importance that it must be given ever greater and more urgent reporting at the heart of the Council's work. Such will give us our best hope for the future.

Ensuring the safety and security of children helps, of course, break the cycles of conflict and insecurity that must not be the legacy for future generations. I wish the Council courage in calling for and ensuring that United Nations peacekeeping operations have the mandates, resources and capacity to save children's lives and secure their welfare. This must extend to safeguarding child protection in peacekeeping transitions, and with an acknowledged privileged role for the experience and views of women who have experienced conflict. These essential protections serve as the foundation for future peace.

I do so commend United Nations child protection staff, monitoring teams and civil society partners for protecting children and monitoring violations, often in dangerous environments. Humanity is indebted.

Accountability

My third point, accountability, is a theme which Ireland champions at the Council.

Pervasive impunity for egregious violations is unacceptable. Eschewing legitimization for actions, it threatens every shred of democracy, undermines multilateralism and meaningful cooperation. This is why the annual report of the Secretary-General, and particularly its listing mechanism, is critical in the effort to publicly identify the parties responsible and to ensure accountability.

The United Nations must, of course, ensure that the impartiality and integrity of this monitoring and reporting mechanism is protected and maintained. Landmark rulings, such as Lubanga and Ongwen, demonstrate the influence and power the International Criminal Court can have.

However, with the principle of complementarity existing at its very core, together with its own requirement for action, the work of the International Criminal Court must be accompanied by greater efforts at national level. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the courage of 178 survivors who testified helped to secure the conviction of Ntabo Ntaberi last year sent a powerful message of hope that impunity will not be tolerated.

Any child associated with an armed group, we must always recognize of course, is primarily a victim.

As such, while the release of nearly 13,000 children last year is a cause for celebration, as a means to help restore some aspects of their childhoods, a

comprehensive, gender- and age-sensitive approach to re-integration, inclusive of children with disabilities, is vital in the efforts to recover and sustain peace.

In conclusion, as we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, let us confront all of the uncomfortable realities of where our actions are insufficient. We are all looked to give a lead on this.

Since 1996, the Council has shaped and advanced such an agenda, and its actions have profoundly improved the lives of many children affected by conflict. Let us commit to generating even greater political will, and the provision of resources, for the integrity, safety and fulfilment of all children and the hope of our future generations.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield

I thank Estonia for hosting this important debate today. I also would like to thank the Secretary-General for his presentation. I want to thank Director Fore for her presentation and everything that UNICEF does around the world to protect children. I also thank Mr. Whitaker and Mr. Onisimus for their briefings today.

Over the course of my nearly four decades serving as an American ambassador and American diplomat, I have visited countless refugee camps, and I've met with so many victims of armed conflict. Of all the tragedies we see, those involving children break our hearts the most. Children will tell us stories that no child should be able to recount. Of being conscripted at gunpoint. Of being raped. Of being forced to murder their own siblings, their own parents. These children are often no taller than the guns they actually carry. They are taught to commit war crimes before they even know how to count. To choose just one example, earlier this month, in the village of Solhan in the Sahel region, a non-State armed group killed more than 130 civilians – many of whom were children. That armed group? Mostly 12- to 14-year-olds. Children killing children – children killing children.

I also recall, more than 20 years ago, meeting a young 15-year-old who had been abducted in Sierra Leone from her family at age 12. And she was taken to the bush, she was gang raped, she was married to a combatant, and she was trained to fight. And when she finally escaped and found her way home to her family, she was rejected. I still recall her dark eyes, and I still hear the sound of her hollow voice, ringing in my ears, saying, "All I want is my mommy." And in certain countries, where the majority of populations are under 18, this is more than a tragedy. It is the decimation of an entire generation. It's murdering the future. From Sierra Leone to Colombia, Somalia to Afghanistan, countless boys and girls are facing violence, or being forced to commit violent acts themselves.

We established the children and armed conflict agenda 25 years ago. A quarter of a century later, we have not done enough. And as a result of the pandemic, this year has been one of the worst. Because of the pandemic, countless schools shut down. I visited a UNICEF exhibition in early March on the United Nations compound displaying empty chairs and backpacks, showing that 214 million children had missed three-quarters of their in-person learning, and more than 880 million continued to face disruption. Without schools, children became much more vulnerable to domestic violence in isolation. Girls in particular face systemic discrimination and their communities are at higher risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation both during and after conflict. Even the fear of attacks on schools are often enough for parents to keep their girls home, disrupting their education and stifling their futures.

Imagine being a parent now in northern Nigeria, as we heard from Mr. Onisimus, where schools are regularly attacked and children abducted for ransom. Those descriptions that we heard were chilling. Just last month, we saw a horrific attack in Afghanistan on schools in which at least 90 girls were killed. This can no longer be a side-issue for us. This is a generation-defining crisis. And we need to act now. At a minimum, the United Nations must ensure that where child protection advisers are mandated and funded, they are trained and deployed immediately. We must be deliberate and thoughtful – and acknowledge the unique and distinct risks faced by girls and boys and make certain that our approach is informed by gender-disaggregated data.

In addition, we need to focus on some of the hotspots where children are facing the most dire threats, like in Syria, in Burma, in Cameroon, and now in Ethiopia. In Burma, we've seen the Tatmadaw unlawfully recruiting children and subjecting them to violence. The Syrian regime continues to have no regard for the welfare of vulnerable children or youth. In the Cameroon Anglophone region, we are deeply concerned by the impact of the continued violence on children. Children have been threatened, and in some cases killed, for attending school. This is a generational loss, my colleagues. And it is truly unacceptable. We need to deploy every diplomatic tool we have to advance dialogue and end the violence. Hold accountable perpetrators and get kids back in school.

Similarly, we must focus on emerging conflicts where children face acute protection challenges, like in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. It is high time the Security Council met publicly on this issue. So, again, I thank the President for Estonia hosting this important debate. And it is past time we take the immensity of children's suffering more seriously.

Around the world, if we want to give the future a fighting chance, we need to act now. The United States is the leading donor to UNICEF. We're a strong believer in its core mandate. And we urge others to generously contribute. Because this is not some small subset of the population. In many places, particularly in countries facing conflict, children are most of the population.

I once had the great honour and fortune of a lifetime to meet Nelson Mandela. And I think of his far-seeing leadership often and I believe his mighty words should steer our vision now. Madiba once said, and I quote, "there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." Today the world's soul is at stake. Let us avert our eyes no longer. Let us protect our children. Let us treat them right. And let's right this wrong, now.

Annex IX

Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Jens Frølich Holte

I thank the President for hosting this year's annual debate on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and Executive Director Fore as well as Mr. Onisimus from Plan International Nigeria and Mr. Whitaker for their statements.

Earlier this year, we asked children in Norway what they think is the most important issue for the Security Council. One child said 'to work for peace and children's rights. Another stated that all children must be able to attend school, also during war, and have a safe childhood. I could not agree more. This underscores why protection of civilians is one of Norway's main priorities for its term on the Security Council. Since we took our seat on the Council, we have worked to make protection of children in conflict a cross-cutting issue on its agenda.

We are approaching the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate on children and armed conflict. Those who were children when the mandate was adopted, have long since become adults. Protecting children from the devastating effects of conflict is more important than ever. We must act now to prevent new cycles of conflict and build sustainable peace.

To succeed, we must work to ensure that the mandate shapes the behaviour of state and non-State actors to end and prevent violations against children. This requires dialogue with parties to conflict and commitments that translate into concrete action. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism for their untiring work. Norway, including as member of the Council, reaffirms our strong support for the mandate. As chair of the working group on children and armed conflict we are committed to strengthening the partnership with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict clearly shows the devastating impact war and conflict have on children. In many ways, childhood is the first victim of war. The United Nations has verified a total of 26,425 grave violations against children in 2020. The highest numbers of violations were the recruitment and use of children, followed by the killing and maiming of children. Verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children increased alarmingly by 90 and 70 per cent, respectively. This in a year that access for monitoring has been hampered by the pandemic.

The pandemic has made the vulnerable even more vulnerable. It has severely magnified the risks children face and increased their need for protection. And it is threatening to undo the gains made in the protection of children in conflict.

For example,

- Loss of family income, closure of schools and disruption of protection activities have left children more exposed to recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, as well as to sexual violence.
- Progress achieved on release and reintegration programmes for children associated with armed forces and groups has been reversed, and ill-treatment in detention has increased.

Violations against children are always unacceptable and these trends are deeply concerning.

We must have the facts to be able to respond adequately. Therefore, the monitoring and reporting mechanism of the United Nations must be given full access, and the political and financial support it needs.

Maintaining the independence, impartiality and credibility of the mandate is crucial. The criteria applied in listing and delisting decisions must be objective.

We must ensure that child protection provisions and operational capacity are included in mandates all relevant of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

President,

Norway strongly condemns the continued attacks against schools and hospitals. We are also concerned about the increased use of schools for military purposes. We know that attacks and insecurity have resulted in the closure of thousands of schools, and denied millions of children education. The civilian character of schools and hospitals must be respected. These attacks deprive children of their rights to health and education, and of the protective environment that schools should normally provide. This has long-term negative consequences for children and their communities.

Norway would like to emphasize the invaluable role of educational institutions. Schools and universities reflect the past, present and future of a community; they are vital to individuals and to societies, economies, and cultures. They are part of the social framework that can support people through crises. They provide individuals with a lifelong foundation, for no one can deprive them of what they have learned while attending school. With education comes dignity. People affected by conflict consistently identify safe access to education for their children as a priority. Protecting these institutions is essential to achieving peace and security and has a firm place on the Council's agenda. We must do more to safeguard educational institutions from military use and attacks, and we must invest more in education in situations of crisis and conflict. Norway urges all countries to join the 109 States, 10 of which are on the Council, that have endorsed and are working together to implement the Safe Schools Declaration.

Norway has been a long-standing advocate for treating children recruited and used in armed conflict, including children associated with armed groups and terrorist organizations, primarily as victims. We urge Member States to treat these children in line with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also call on all States who have not yet done so, to ratify the Optional Protocol on children in armed conflict, and to endorse the Paris Principles.

The Secretary-General has put forth a number of recommendations in his report. Norway supports these and urges all States, parties, and other relevant actors to implement them along with the conclusions agreed in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Children living in conflict have no time to lose. Their childhood and our common future is at stake. Let's join forces and act now to ensure a better life for the millions of children living in armed conflict.

Annex X

Statement by the Minister of State with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Keisal Peters

Let me begin by thanking our distinguished briefers, the Secretary-General, António Guterres, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, the Advocate for Children Affected by War, Forest Whitaker, and the Education Specialist at Plan International Nigeria, Laban Onisimus, for presenting, in very clear terms, the urgency with which we must act in service of our children.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines takes this opportunity, in the twenty-fifth year since the emergence of the children and armed conflict mandate, to acknowledge the remarkable progress in shifting consciousness and in creating national mechanisms to protect and promote the wellbeing of children in fragile and conflict affected countries and regions. Against this backdrop, we congratulate the Office of the Special Representative of Children in Armed Conflict upon receiving the Sapienza Human Rights Award 2020; another signal and most deserving achievement.

In spite of progress made, the number and severity of verified grave violations against children, in 2020, remains worryingly unchanged. This is especially concerning, given the challenges encountered by the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms (MRMs), as a result of COVID-19 containment measures globally. As we have heard this morning, children, particularly refugee and displaced children, suffer the worst effects of the ever changing and complex nature of armed conflict. The report of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF, on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, paints a grim picture of how the situation for children is further compounded by the current health and related economic crises. There is urgent need for adherence to the call for a global ceasefire, and to ensure that the pandemic response and recovery programmes are both child-centred and gender-responsive.

Emerging child protection actions, mechanisms, and related adaptation measures must embed critical gender analysis. This will ensure appropriately tailored responses for girls and boys who are differently affected by violence in armed conflict. Although significantly underreported, the overwhelming majority of sexual violence is perpetrated against girls; a situation made worse by the reduced capacity of national, regional and international actors to engage in prevention, and protection work, and to provide psychosocial support for children. Girls are also disproportionately affected by school closures and overall attacks against education. They are far less likely to return to schools and suffer increased risk of experiencing sexual violence in these contexts. Boys are however far more likely to be victims of the most prevalent verified violations. They are killed and maimed, and recruited and used at much higher rates when compared to girls. In addition, boys are more likely to be detained in state institutions and to be held by armed groups.

We welcome necessary developments to improve accountability and implement increased child protection measures. These developments include:

1. The appointment of a Minister Counsellor to the President on child protection and the Promulgation of the Child protection code criminalizing child recruitment in the Central African Republic;
2. The November 2020 launch of the child protection policy by the Ministry of the Interior in Afghanistan, where there exists an alarmingly high number of children killed and maimed; and

3. Advances on the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, through a draft law on the protection of education against attacks in Mali.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines underscores the importance of actions which emphasize rehabilitation, reintegration and the consistent application of handover protocols in line with juvenile justice standards established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict; recognizing, of course, that children are, first and foremost, victims of armed conflict. We are gravely concerned about the erosion of progress on child protection, as what we are now witnessing is a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, linked to increasingly complex and challenging security contexts, globally.

Certainly, a combination of political will and national ownership; cooperation between the United Nations and regional bodies; and consistent and predictable funding is required to ensure compliance, by States, with their obligations to protect children, as enshrined in the relevant international accountability mechanisms. These include adherence to international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, juvenile justice standards under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all other relevant international accountability mechanisms.

In closing I wish to recall analysis drawn from the 2017 policy on child protection in peacekeeping operations. We must ensure that relevant child protection provisions are consistently included in the mandates of all United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

We must remind ourselves that children bear no responsibility for violent conflict. Yet, they remain most adversely affected. Let us seize this moment of collective and renewed commitment to embark on truly transformative actions for the sake of all the world's children.

Annex XI

Statement by the Foreign Secretary of India, Harsh Vardhan Shringla

I congratulate the delegation of Estonia for organizing this important annual open debate as we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda. I note with appreciation the presence of António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF and Forest Whitaker, United Nations Goodwill Ambassador. I also thank Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other briefers for sharing their insights with us today.

Mahatma Gandhi said (and I quote) “If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we will not have to struggle; we will not have to pass fruitless idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the whole world is hungering”. (Unquote.)

Unfortunately, we are not living in an ideal world today. As noted by the Secretary-General in his report, the scale and severity of violations perpetrated against children in armed conflict remains on the rise. It is clear that there remain significant challenges to the effective implementation of this mandate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further negatively affected children in situations of armed conflict, including by hampering their access to education, health and social services. It has made them susceptible to grave violations, particularly through recruitment and abduction. It is, therefore, important that States keep child protection concerns at the core of their pandemic response measures and recovery plans.

National Governments have the primary responsibility for protecting the rights of the child as mandated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We encourage Member States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to adopt robust legal frameworks for protection and promotion of child rights. The aim should not be merely protecting children from child-related crimes but also to provide them with holistic development opportunities, including free and compulsory education.

We are witnessing a dangerous and worrying trend in global terrorism and that is an increase in the number of children that are being recruited and involved in terrorism-related activities. Terror groups take advantage of the fact that children are the most susceptible to manipulation. School closures due to the pandemic have provided an even greater opportunity to these terrorist groups to target children, including through online avenues, for radicalization and indoctrination in violent extremist ideologies. We believe that there is a need for a more coordinated approach in implementing the child protection and counter terrorism agendas. States need to demonstrate greater political will to hold the perpetrators of terrorism and their sponsors to account, and to fulfil the Council’s child protection obligations.

We also call for ending impunity for all actors responsible for inciting and perpetrating grave violations against children. There must be greater accountability and sincere efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice by Governments from whose territory such entities operate.

Close cooperation between the United Nations and its Member States concerned is critical for developing an effective and sustainable policy for repatriation and

reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. States should adopt an inclusive approach to provide protection to child victims during the rehabilitation and reintegration process in post-conflict situations. Assistance to national Governments for capacity-building and strengthening legal and operational tools for child protection is vital. The monitoring and reporting mechanism of the United Nations should ensure continuous involvement of and close cooperation with the Member States concerned, including ensuring the veracity and reliability of data collection.

Based on our experience in United Nations peacekeeping over the decades, we recognize the importance of having sufficient resources and requisite number of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions for the effective implementation of child protection programmes. The Council may consider incorporating adequate child protection provisions and capacities in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Despite the Council's clear mandate, we note with concern that the report of the Secretary-General includes situations that are not situations of armed conflict or threats to the maintenance of international peace and security. We must be cautious as attempts to selectively expand the mandate politicizes the agenda, diverting attention from real threats to international peace and security and to children in armed conflict.

We note with appreciation that the engagement of the United Nations, particularly the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, with parties engaged in armed conflict has resulted in the release of 12,643 children over the last year. This positive trend must continue.

Let me conclude by reiterating India's firm commitment to supporting the United Nations in its endeavours to protect children in situations of armed conflict.

Annex XII

Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, Dang Hoang Giang

Viet Nam would like to thank the Secretary-General and all briefers for their insightful remarks. We also thank the Estonian presidency for convening this important debate.

Our resistance war ended almost half a century ago. Yet the legacy of tragic losses and sufferings, especially when it comes to children, lingered on. As such, protecting children from hostilities and deplorable abuses in armed conflict is an issue that Viet Nam holds dear to our hearts and a continued priority from our first tenure at the Council in 2008–2009. Sadly, the situation has been worsening over time.

We are deeply concerned over the unacceptably high level of grave violations against children, according to the Secretary-General's latest report. Regrettably, the figures in the report are just the tip of the iceberg.

We strongly condemn all acts of violence and abuse against children and call for an immediate cessation of such wrongful practices.

Since the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda 25 years ago, positive changes have been made thanks to the tremendous efforts of the United Nations and the international community. Hundreds of thousands of children have been rescued and freed from armed groups, reintegrated into their families, and returned to school.

Yet our work is far from over. With that, I would like to highlight the following points:

First, saving children emanates from acts to stop violence, end wars and sustain peace in every corner of the world. This is the prerequisite to ensure children are protected and live to their full potentials. We urge all parties to conflict to promptly implement the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in 2020.

Second, we call for full respect for and compliance with the international law, especially the international humanitarian law. Greater strides should aim at ensuring unhindered access of children to humanitarian assistance, including COVID-19 vaccines. Together with coordinated efforts of the Council within its mandate, the role of UNICEF, UNDP, WHO and other relevant actors should be fully leveraged in facilitating humanitarian relief activities on the ground.

Third, the protection of essential civilian infrastructure, especially schools and hospitals, must be ensured. We welcome the significant efforts of Member States in implementing Security Council resolutions [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2286 \(2016\)](#) and [2573 \(2021\)](#), and we believe that these should continue to be vigorously pursued.

Having said that, Viet Nam endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and encourage States that have yet done so to consider joining this commitment to enable the continuity of safe education for all children in armed conflicts.

Last but not least, child protection should be put at the core of peacekeeping. We urge the continued integration of child protection components in the mandates of all relevant United Nations peacekeeping operations and political missions. In doing so, the United Nations blue helmets and other United Nations agencies present on the ground can help break the vicious cycle of violence and poverty and sow the seed for durable peace.

Let me conclude by sharing a story about Vietnamese peacekeepers in South Sudan and Central African Republic. They taught English to the local children wherever possible, be it in a playground, a garden or a deserted school, with tables and chairs made from recycled wooden box. They helped the children there enlighten a hope for a better future and equip themselves for that journey. I believe there are plenty of such stories around the world waiting to be told and spread.

Let us all build a brighter future for our children, starting from today.

Annex XIII

Statement by the Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom, James Cleverly

I would like to thank the President of the Security Council for convening this vital debate, and the briefers for their insightful presentations.

The of the Secretary-General shows, even 25 years on from the mandate, how far we still need to travel to end the suffering of children.

The scale and severity of the violations committed against children is appalling.

I am particularly concerned about the increase in countries already on the Council's agenda, like Somalia.

This reinforces the urgency of holding elections, so the Government can refocus on the country's many challenges, not least protecting its children.

The UK stands ready to support Somalia, both bilaterally and through United Nations channels.

The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must continue to hold parties-to-conflict to account for their actions.

I am pleased to see Tatmadaw have been relisted for recruitment of children. It is critical they implement the joint action plan on the non-recruitment of children signed in 2012.

Greater transparency on listing decisions would ensure the reputation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism of the United Nations is not only sustained, but strengthened.

I would also like to draw attention to the plight of children in Ethiopia and Mozambique.

In the Tigray region of Ethiopia, children have been subjected to horrific sexual abuse. Unaccompanied minors have been forced to flee their homes as refugees, and according to IPC data, thousands of children face famine.

Seven months on, there is no end to the conflict in sight, though we continue to call for a cessation.

In Mozambique we have reports of children being kidnapped and forcibly recruited, as well as horrific stories of beheadings of children as young as 11, by terrorist insurgents in Cabo Delgado.

I hope next year's report highlights these atrocities.

This year's report shows how the pandemic has disproportionately affected the world's most vulnerable, and been devastating for children in conflict.

COVID-19 has tested the resilience of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which must continue its evidence-based approach, and rise above politics to focus on the interests of every child.

COVID-19 has also increased the challenge of accessing education in conflict.

Last week, I met with young people from Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Syria.

The words of a young Afghan girl have stayed with me.

She said:

“When I was holding my pen and notebook in my hands and left for school with thousands of wishes, I was thinking ‘I am one step closer to my dreams’. But, now, I am under the ground with all my dreams ... What did I do wrong? Why was I your target?”

Her words should serve as a rallying call for the Security Council to condemn the alarming increase in attacks on schools and in abductions of and sexual violence against girls.

Colleagues here will know that girls’ access to education is even lower in times of crisis. In losing access to school, girls not only lose the opportunity to learn, but also the protection that schools afford: from domestic violence, early and forced marriage and teenage pregnancy.

It is a matter of urgency that we incorporate gender perspectives into all our thinking about children in armed conflict.

The United Kingdom is committed to leaving no girls behind, and 12 years of quality education by 2030.

More than ever, with the terrible impact of the pandemic, it is imperative that girls’ education remains at the top of the agenda, so we can achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030.

Looking forward, and with the words of that young Afghan girl in mind, Members have a moral responsibility to mainstream child protection across United Nations mandates, resolutions and sanctions and through special political missions, United Nations agencies and country teams.

I call on all Members to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to implement the Paris Principles, Safe Schools Declaration and Vancouver Principles.

These instruments demonstrate our commitment to listen to children, and to provide them with the safety and security they all deserve.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

[Original: Chinese]

I welcome the chairing of this meeting by Ms. Kaljulaid, and thank Secretary-General Mr. Guterres, Ms. Fore and all those who have given briefings.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Over the past 25 years, the international community has made many efforts to protect children from the harms of war. The protection of children has been integrated into all aspects of United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding work. These achievements are inseparable from the unremitting efforts and hard work of the Secretary General and his special representatives, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and all the workers on the front line of child protection.

Sadly, today, 25 years later, children remain the most innocent victims of war. More than 26,000 grave violations against children were recorded in the 2020 report of the Secretary General alone. In Afghanistan, the local security situation has taken a turn for the worse as foreign troops begin to withdraw. Two attacks on students took place in less than two weeks from the end of April to the beginning of May, with nearly 100 girls killed in the 8 May attack. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the 11-day conflict in May of this year killed 72 Palestinian children and 2 Israeli children. More than 30 schools in the Gaza Strip were destroyed by artillery fire, forcing the suspension of classes for nearly 600,000 students. Nadine Abdel Taif, a ten-year-old Palestinian girl, burst into tears at the sight of her ruined home. She kept asking herself: "What did I do wrong? Why must I endure this?" This is a question for the entire international community. What can we do for these children? How can we reduce the harm to children caused by armed conflict? This is precisely the issue we need to explore and resolve here at this meeting.

Achieving peace is the best protection for children. Only ceasefires and an end to violence can heal children's war wounds. Continuing war and chaos can only mean suffering for more children. All parties to conflict should actively respond to and implement the appeal of the Secretary General for a global ceasefire, and resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation. The Security Council should continue to promote the political resolution of hotspot issues, and promote child protection throughout the entire process of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, as an important element of good offices mediation, peace negotiation, and disarmament and demobilization. The Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, formulated by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, is a useful initiative, and we hope that it will play its due role as it is put into practice.

Grave violations against children must stop immediately. The six types of grave violations against children stipulated in the resolutions of the Security Council breach the boundaries of international humanitarian law and challenge the bottom line of human conscience. They should be consigned to a zone of prohibition for all parties to conflicts. China condemns all grave violations against children, including the killing of civilians and children by foreign troops in Afghanistan, and those responsible should be held accountable. China calls on parties to conflicts that have signed child protection action plans with the United Nations to put them into effect, and parties to conflicts that have not yet signed such an action plan to do so as soon as possible. The Security Council provides powerful tools for child protection, including the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's

rights in situations of armed conflict, the annual reports of the Secretary General, and the country-specific conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. All of these should be used well and adequately. In the final analysis, protecting children depends on the efforts of the countries involved. The international community should urge all countries to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and increase funding and technical support to help the countries concerned to improve their child protection capabilities. In the Secretary General's reports, the listing and delisting of parties to conflict involving grave violations against children should be evidence-based and should adhere to the principles of humanitarianism and non-politicization.

We must step up efforts to achieve the all-round development of children. Tens of millions of children in conflict are suffering from malnutrition and disease, defenceless against impoverishment and loss of education. The international community must increase assistance, and United Nations development agencies must give full play to their role in giving children in armed conflict with fair opportunities to rise above their difficulties and realize their potential, avoid being forced to join armed groups to survive, and escape falling into vicious circles of violent conflict. Unilateral coercive measures gravely violate children's rights to survival and development. So-called humanitarian exemptions are useless, and all unilateral coercive measures should be lifted immediately. Children threatened by terrorist forces should receive equal protection, and the United Nations agencies concerned should increase their efforts to bring about the repatriation of children of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. In the context of the global fight against the pandemic, special attention must be given children affected by conflict, so as to ensure that they are not left behind in terms of vaccination and distance learning.

The protection of children is the responsibility of all countries and Governments, and should be the highest priority in any situation. There is still a long way to go in this regard. The abuse of Aboriginal children in Canadian boarding schools, with the loss of more than 4,000 lives, is shocking and outrageous. We cannot allow this dark page to simply remain in the history books. We urge the Canadian Government to earnestly fulfil its responsibilities, let the world know the truth, and give justice to the victims to avoid such a tragedy from happening again.

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

[Original: French]

I would like to thank the Secretary General, Ms. Gamba and Ms. Fore, as well as all our other guests, for their statements.

Since 2005, our efforts have resulted in the freeing of more than 150,000 children, thanks to the commitment of the Security Council, successive Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and civil society. This is one of the great, but little-known, successes of the Security Council over the past 15 years.

We must do more to implement the protection framework created by resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#). This ambitious and innovative resolution, put forward at the time by France and Benin, has since provided a structure for our collective action.

However, grave violations against children continue at alarming levels, fuelled by the escalation of conflict. We must make the best use of the tools in place. Those involved in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict need political and financial support to operate in safety.

The restrictions brought by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have limited our ability to monitor and respond to serious violations against children. I would like to express my gratitude to all child-protection and civil-society actors who have continued to ensure the smooth functioning of the mechanism, despite the current circumstances.

The socio-economic consequences of the pandemic and school closures are putting children at greater risk: inequalities are increasing in all regions of the world. Acts of domestic violence, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as dropping out of school, have increased.

School closures increase recruitment by armed groups, and child labour. In these instances, as in others, girls also have specific vulnerabilities. I am thinking in particular of the risk of early and forced marriage.

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, it supports projects that ensure access to education in emergency situations, including the "Education Cannot Wait" fund. Through the Global Partnership for Education, France is funding an \$11 million project in the Niger to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the education system.

Because girls are particularly affected, as I said, France supports the creation of protective environments in schools. This is one of the objectives of the "Priorité à l'Égalité" (Priority to Equality) initiative in the Sahel countries, for which France is providing 10 million euros of funding. Our action also includes a component devoted to care, in the face of the unacceptable increase in sexual mutilation and violence. This is the direction of several projects we support in Iraq, and of our contribution to the Mukwege-Murad Fund for survivors of sexual violence.

The Security Council must remain mobilized, not only through its working group but also in all its action. France's commitment is guaranteed.

Annex XVI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani**

I also thank the Secretary-General António Guterres, Henrietta Fore, Forest Whitaker, and Laban Onisimus for their informative briefings.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Kenya welcomes this opportunity to reflect on further efforts needed to protect children globally affected by armed conflict.

As recorded in the Secretary-General's latest report, in 2020, the United Nations verified close to 30,000 grave violations against children translating to about 100 violations committed every day.

We call on all parties in situations of armed conflict to adhere to their obligations under international law regarding the safety of children.

There are immediate measures that need to be taken by the Security Council to protect children in armed conflict. Among them are strengthening child protection tools in United Nations peace missions by embedding them in mandates and following up to ensure accountability.

For today, however, I want to focus most on protecting children from terrorism.

Kenya is especially concerned by the continued radicalization and recruitment of children and youth by terrorist groups.

Beyond the direct recruitment efforts, large populations that of course include children, are also being subjected to persistent narratives of hatred and discrimination intended to recruit their passive and active support for the aims of Al Qaeda and ISIS groups.

This is certainly the case in Somalia today where Al Shabaab, a declared and acknowledged Al Qaeda affiliate, has a clear strategy for targeting children. In addition to seeking children for their ranks, Al Shabaab has also periodically attacked educational institutions and murdering students.

It is for these reasons that Kenya regards robust and consistent counter terrorism as key to the protection of children. The Security Council can do more on this front. First in sanctioning terrorist groups and their supporters and financial infrastructure more effectively.

There is an overstated tension that has been projected in the Council between humanitarian aid delivery and counter terrorism. Specifically, the argument has been made that Security Council counter terrorism resolutions frustrate or compromise humanitarian work.

We believe that it needs to be more keenly appreciated is the humanitarian disasters, and their impact on children, that result in counter terrorism measures that lack robust international cooperation.

The Security Council can show its seriousness in protecting children by deploying tough sanctions against terrorist groups that recruit or target children.

As many terrorism campaigns become protracted, new generations are growing up with parents who are fighters or in areas where they are exposed to prolonged

radicalization. Left unchanged, it promises these groups recruits for successive generations. We must try and break this deadly chain.

We recommend a renewed focus on delivering innovative disarmament, demobilization and re-integration programmes. Kenya has been calling for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration plus programmes that take into consideration the reintegration of former terrorist fighters and minors who have been radicalized or recruited.

We call for the Secretary-General to form an initiative that deploys training and capacity-building for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration plus, and for the Security Council to provide resources in missions for its implementation.

As Mr. Onisimus stated, “schools should be safe for children”. I reiterate Kenya’s commitment to the Safe Schools Declaration.

We can do more to protect schools. Student safety and security should be key Government deliverables. Kenya is pioneering the use of tools to allow our citizens to protect their children, students, schoolmates and friends from radicalisation conducive to terrorism. This is being done as part of an overall student safety and security framework, and is being rolled out to schools with the support of a trained disengagement corps deployed nationwide.

Kenya looks forward to supporting further efforts made by the Security Council to protect children in situations of conflict.

Annex XVII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

We welcome the organization of this debate. We also welcome the presentations by the Secretary-General; the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and Mr. Whitaker and Mr. Onisimus. As we have heard, civil society plays a key role in caring for children in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Only a month ago, the Security Council condemned the attack on a school in Kabul in which more than fifty people, including several girls, were killed. The press covered the story of Amina and Masooma, two young girls who were attending the school; one died, and the other was debating whether to resume her studies after experiencing such a tragedy. Today, a tragedy of that magnitude barely registers in our collective consciousness.

Such stories underlie each of the cases included in the report of the Secretary-General. We ask that in each of the situations reviewed by this Council, which continue to dismay us, efforts be made to alleviate and resolve the plight of children and adolescents, who are the most vulnerable victims of armed conflict.

The Safe Schools Declaration, recently signed by Mexico and to which we invite those States that have not yet done so to accede, is an effort aimed at protecting educational establishments.

The terrible case of Amina and Masooma in Kabul is just one example of how conflict situations curtail the right to education. As we have heard in several presentations this morning, attacks on schools and their use for military purposes also expose children to other risks, such as recruitment by armed groups.

Child recruitment is one of the worst violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. As a result, that crime cannot go unpunished. Delivering justice is one of the ways in which children can get their lives back on track. In this context, the work of the International Criminal Court and its growing body of case law, which not only serves to combat impunity but also contributes to preventing such crimes from being committed in the future, are critical. Mexico reiterates its support for the International Criminal Court and calls for strengthening synergies with the mandate of the Security Council and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. We also stress that, when it comes to detention, children, including those associated with armed groups, must be treated as victims. We reiterate that they should not be held in prisons, and international standards of juvenile justice must be applied.

The pandemic has exacerbated children's vulnerability, and among its most damaging consequences is the effect it has had on their mental health and psychosocial well-being. The impact in terms of sexual violence is particularly severe. Child survivors must therefore be given greater access to comprehensive health services tailored to their individual needs, including sexual and reproductive health services and mental health and psychosocial support, which are essential for healing psychological trauma and rebuilding social structures.

It is necessary to improve the understanding of the gender dimension of grave violations, including through disaggregated data, and to ensure that services and assistance programmes are designed through that lens. It is also imperative to address the correlation between the proliferation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and gender-based violence, which can lead to sexual violence in both

conflict and post-conflict situations. As a concrete measure to protect children, States should suspend all arms sales and exports to any party listed in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General.

We agree with the Secretary-General on the importance of mainstreaming child protection in the Council's agenda. The role of child protection advisers must be strengthened in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, as echoed by several colleagues and special political missions.

Finally, in the context of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, we express our appreciation to all United Nations officials who work daily on behalf of children, fighting to ensure that tragedies such as that of Amina and Masooma in Kabul and those of so many others do not continue to occur and, even more importantly, are not forgotten.

Annex XVIII

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, G.V. Kuzmin

[Original: Russian]

We are grateful to Estonia for hosting today's meeting and are pleased to welcome its President as our Chair. We would like to thank United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Henrietta Fore and the other speakers for their substantive presentations.

We note the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba.

The Russian Federation regards the issue of child protection as a priority. We have carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General, which overall provides a sufficient overview of the situation. We are forced to note that children, who are among the most vulnerable sections of the population, continue to suffer from the effects of hostile actions, despite the national and international measures put in place.

We strongly condemn violations of international humanitarian law, especially those committed against children by parties to armed conflict. The parties responsible for these crimes should, after proper investigation, be held criminally responsible. We consider unacceptable both the deliberate targeting of children and other categories of protected persons, and the indiscriminate or excessive use of force.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has worsened the already serious plight of children in areas of armed conflict. Social and economic life has been the primary victim. Meanwhile, some countries continue to exert pressure and actively apply unilateral coercive measures that include preventing the supply of coronavirus vaccines, and equipment for diagnosis and treatment.

We note the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We believe that the approach to addressing child protection issues within that unique mechanism should be comprehensive, as envisaged in Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions of the Council. This presupposes devoting equal attention to all six categories of grave violations against children, both in the operation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict and in the work of the associated thematic working group of the Council. It should be remembered that the primary responsibility for the protection of children in conflict lies with States, and the Security Council Working Group should first and foremost address the most acute and widespread situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Council.

We are extremely concerned about the situation of children in Syria located in territories not under the control of Damascus – in the Idlib de-escalation zone and in the north-east of the country.

Idlib is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which is recognized by the Council as a terrorist organization. The local population is essentially being used as a human shield by the terrorists. Children are particular victims of the whims of the local authorities. The enclave has recorded an increase in child and early marriages. Schoolchildren are banned from leaving the enclave to travel to government territories to take their exams.

The situation in the Hawl and Rawj camps for internally displaced persons in the north-east of the country is no less disastrous. Temporary accommodation facilities are overcrowded and extremist ideology and religious radicalism are actively inculcated there. We reiterate our call on countries to comply with their

obligations under international law and to take steps to repatriate children of their nationals from areas of armed conflict. We stand ready to share our experience, having repatriated 318 of our children from Syria and Iraq since 2018, and being actively engaged in their rehabilitation.

Moreover, the situation in Syria has been substantially further complicated by the illegal unilateral sanctions imposed by the West. Syria is experiencing shortages of essential foodstuffs, food, clean drinking water, milk formula, medicine and textbooks. Paying lip service to concern over the plight of children, Western donors refuse to finance not only projects to rebuild the country, but also infrastructure projects for rapid rehabilitation.

The situation in Afghanistan is also a cause for concern. The Security Council has already held detailed discussions on the deteriorating situation in that country, on Tuesday, 22 June. Unfortunately, the situation there has changed very little over the past 20 years or more in terms of the protection of civilians and children. Sad statistics show that children have been regularly hit by airstrikes, including airstrikes by foreign forces.

Afghanistan continues to be shaken by bloody terrorist attacks, the most recent of which were perpetrated by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Children are among the victims of these heinous attacks. One recent example of such atrocities is the May attack on a girls' school. We condemn these crimes and call for them to be investigated and for the perpetrators to be punished.

Child protection in Africa is notoriously difficult. Particularly in countries on the agenda of the Security Council, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and the Central African Republic. Violence not only affects girls, but also boys, who are much more likely to be recruited by armed groups. For example, significantly more crimes are committed against boys and young men in Somalia. The activities of the Boko Haram group, based in the Lake Chad basin area, have long crossed borders.

Ukraine is a source of particular pain for us. For more than seven years it has been in a state of political chaos, civil war, legal nihilism and rampant ultra-nationalism. For the eighth year, the Kiev regime, which came to power in a coup d'état, has been trying to massacre the people of eastern Ukraine. With the help of the regular army and punitive volunteer battalions under Nazi symbols. Using heavy weaponry. Schools, hospitals, children's playgrounds and key infrastructure continue to come under target fire from the Ukrainian military.

More than a hundred children have been killed by the Ukrainian military during the armed conflict. In the Donetsk People's Republic, 93 children are recorded as having died. Two hundred and sixty-three children have been left injured and 43 have been left disabled. In the Luhansk People's Republic, 34 children are recorded as having died.

These are the terrible numbers attached to the tragedy in the Donbass. I could read you the names of the children who died.

That is why residents of this region continue to carry flowers to the "Alley of Angels", a monument to the children who died at the hands of the Ukrainian military who took up arms against their people.

Annex XIX

Statement by the delegation of Tunisia

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I should like to congratulate your country, Estonia, on its successful presidency of the Security Council this month and to thank you for devoting this high-level meeting to a discussion of the issue of children and armed conflict. This is a critical issue, and we share your view that it deserves to be one of the principal concerns of the Security Council, not only when discussing the Secretary-General's annual report but also when addressing the various conflicts on the Council agenda and when renewing the mandates of the various United Nations missions.

I must not fail to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report and valuable briefing. I also commend the important work done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict and her team and all the parties engaged in monitoring and verifying the violations to which children are subjected in armed conflicts and in seeking to provide them with better protection.

I am pleased to welcome the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to commend the Fund's effective participation in efforts to free children from all forms of exploitation and ensure their reintegration. I further thank the representatives of civil society for their important contributions.

Armed conflict represents one of the most serious challenges to international peace and security and one of the principal causes of human tragedy in all its forms. However, it is the violations, atrocities and horrific crimes to which children are subjected during armed conflict that constitute the gravest and most terrible repercussions of conflict. Children represent the weakest and most vulnerable group in society and are the most likely to be affected by the aftermath of these violations. The effects on children and their communities continue to be felt even after conflict has ended and settlement reached.

Given that conflict resolution and prevention are of paramount importance, protecting children from the grave violations to which they are exposed during conflict represents an absolute priority and collective responsibility that falls within the framework of the efforts of the international community to preserve international peace and security and ensure the triumph of international humanitarian law and the rights of the child. It also falls directly within the Security Council's commitment to its core responsibilities.

The establishment 16 years ago of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, alongside the creation of the working group on this issue, represented a milestone in the Security Council's treatment of this issue, enabling it to determine more accurately and objectively the nature and scale of the violations, including recruitment, killing, maiming, abduction and sexual abuse. It has also enabled the United Nations to engage with the parties to conflict in several regions and formulate action plans to halt grave violations against children, prevent violations from occurring and free thousands of children from the cycle of exploitation and suffering. Despite the progress achieved in implementing this mandate, the situation of children in many conflict zones is, regrettably, still a matter of deep concern, as highlighted by the growing number of grave violations verified by the United Nations in recent years, including 26,425 in 2020 according to the latest report of the Secretary-General ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)).

Moreover, there has been an alarming 70 percent rise in cases of sexual abuse of children. This is a shocking indicator, particularly in view of the sustained

underreporting of cases due to fear of stigmatisation or reprisal, as well as inadequate or non-existent accountability and the lack of sexual and reproductive health services and psychological counselling for sexually abused girls.

Another key indicator requiring action on the part of the international community and Security Council is the sustained high level of recruitment and use of children as soldiers in conflict zones by non-State actors, including armed groups, terrorist organizations and criminal networks (8,521 cases have been monitored).

The sustained increase in these violations at such an alarming rate serves to prolong and deepen the impact of conflict, fragment communities and hinder the path of subsequent peacebuilding, stabilisation and recovery. It also highlights the indifference of the parties concerned to international humanitarian law and international human rights law and underscores once again the need for stronger and more effective mechanisms of accountability.

Tunisia, as a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000), calls for all obligations under the Convention to be met and for all measures to be taken to prevent the recruitment of children. Tunisia further stresses the importance of implementing all relevant international instruments, noting that such instruments will only be as effective as our collective will to apply them.

In this regard, we support the Secretary-General's call for strong national accountability measures to be adopted for grave violations and for cooperation with mechanisms of international accountability, such as the International Criminal Court, to be strengthened.

Likewise, Tunisia welcomes all initiatives designed to provide sustainable recovery and re-integration programmes for children, along the lines called for in resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#) and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2007), to which Tunisia acceded upon adoption.

We believe that the Secretary-General's report understates the actual number of atrocities, given that a significant proportion could not be monitored or verified due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The pandemic has had unprecedented repercussions for everyone without exception. However, it has disproportionately affected certain vulnerable groups, notably children in armed conflict, putting them at increased risk of grave violations, including recruitment and sexual abuse, while diminishing their chances of enjoying protection, welfare, education and health services. Accordingly, we reaffirm the need to implement resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#) and renew our demand for a comprehensive and immediate end to hostilities worldwide, in response to the Secretary-General's appeal.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that commitment to a ceasefire, ending wars and engaging constructively in political settlement and peacebuilding remains in the end the most effective way to protect children from the grave repercussions of conflicts which they did not start and to enable them to enjoy their childhood in a safer and gentler world. They are, after all, our true wealth and hope for the future.

Annex XX

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

I would like to begin by extending our appreciation to Estonia for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. I further thank Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, Forest Whitaker, Advocate for Children Affected by War with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation, and Laban Onisimus, Education Specialist at Plan International Nigeria, for their comprehensive briefings.

In the Arria-formula meeting we held on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict last May, I highlighted the Afghan Government's efforts to ensure the safety of our children against the backdrop of an escalating conflict and a concerning humanitarian outlook exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic. Since then, attacks targeting civilian centres, such as the horrific attack on the school in Dasht-E-Barchi, have intensified. The recent report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan, has verified 552 child casualties, including 52 girls and 99 boys killed, and 401 children maimed. It is a situation that accentuates the critically urgent nature of this meeting.

The Afghan Government remains committed to the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The joint action plan between the Government of Afghanistan and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is a clear testimony to our commitment and it has achieved remarkable results.

As proof of the progress achieved, we are happy to note that the Afghanistan National Police has been delisted from the annual report annexes.

The delisting is the result of concerted efforts over a long period of time. The Government has strengthened and implemented policies regarding the upgraded Penal Code of 2017 and the Law on Protection of Child Rights, adopted through a presidential decree in 2019. Child protection units established in the Afghanistan National Police across all provinces and child protection policies adopted by the Ministry of Interior and other relevant security structures have helped ensure that there have been no new recorded cases of child recruitment.

However, despite these updates we understand that a lot remains to be done and align with the Secretary-General over his serious concerns on the number of children maimed and killed. The Afghan Government is collaborating and working with the United Nations to ensure that children are prioritized for protection during military operations. To ensure success, we recently launched the policy for the protection of children in armed conflict and security sectors together with United Nations partners. We are fully committed to turn this policy into practice.

We are further engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the United Nations office in Kabul to reinforce national legislations and further mainstream child protection efforts throughout the different sections of our national security architecture and in our efforts for peace and reconciliation. On this, we underscore "The practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict" as an invaluable tool which could provide important inputs in this regard.

Though we continue to make progress on our commitment to mitigate civilian casualties, including children, it is imperative to acknowledge that we face significant challenges and are impeded in our efforts by armed groups, particularly the Taliban.

These groups continue to use heinous practices, including recruiting children as fighters and using civilians and their vital infrastructure as cover, that put children in harm's way. The last few months have revealed to all of us the extent of the inhumane acts that non-State armed groups brazenly commit. They target children, girl's going to school, minorities, maternity wards, and humanitarian workers.

We once again call on the Taliban to join us in respecting and enforcing a ceasefire, for the sake of Afghanistan, the country we share, and its children.

Rather than respect the national call for a ceasefire, the Taliban has so far continued to exploit the global pandemic with impunity, directing violence at our most vulnerable communities. I call on our international partners to support us in holding them accountable through diplomatic pressure and the effective implementation and potential expansion of sanctions, as needed.

I reiterate that as long as the Taliban and other terrorist and non-State armed groups are not committed to prioritizing the safety of children, we will not be successful in our efforts to protect all children from violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges. It has complicated our efforts to deliver on child protection activities and, thereby, increased the risk of grave violations against conflict-affected young populations. It is, therefore, crucial to ensure that children remain at the centre of our COVID-19 response and recovery programmes.

To successfully overcome these challenges and meet our objectives, we want to reiterate the need for strong, clearly defined child protection mandates for the United Nations in Afghanistan. The United Nations is our key partner in our efforts to advance the protection of children. It is therefore critical that we fund dedicated personnel, and allocate appropriate budgets to country task forces on monitoring and reporting, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and UNICEF.

I want to especially highlight the crucial but under-resourced reintegration, service and assistance programmes which must be timely, gender and age responsive and inclusive. We call on donors to redouble their valuable support to child protection through sustainable and adequate financial and technical support.

More than 50 per cent of our population is under the age of 15 and our humanitarian response plan paints a dire picture of the situation faced by many Afghans. The number of people in need has increased from 9.4 million to 18.4 million this year. But we must think beyond statistics. Afghanistan's children represent the aspiration of our people for peace and prosperity and their rights are non-negotiable.

Once again, let me emphasize Afghanistan's appreciation for the tireless work and efforts of UNAMA and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to protect the rights of the children of Afghanistan. We remain a dedicated partner and in close cooperation and consultation in Kabul and New York to ensure that we are sustaining and improving upon our progress.

Annex XXI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations, Sofiane Mimouni**

At the outset, my delegation would like to congratulate Estonia for its leadership as the President of the Security Council for the Month of June 2021 and for organizing this very important annual open debate on children and armed conflict.

I avail myself of this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to António Guterres, Secretary-General, Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and all the speakers for their informative briefings.

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Children and Armed Conflicts Agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict by the General Assembly and the tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#) that gave the United Nations a mandate to identify and list those parties to armed conflict who attack schools or protected persons in relation to schools, it is deeply shocking to witness a constant increase in violations against children, as is underlined by the report of the Secretary-General ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)).

While we speak today, thousands of children are trapped in armed conflicts all over the world with an increasing number of children, especially girls, victims living in the Sahel region. The surge in the numbers of killings, maiming of children, and recruitment of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence and abductions as well as attacks against hospitals is concerning. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact across the world with a disproportionate impact on children in armed conflicts.

Against this backdrop, the Security Council's discussions should not end up with a mere renewal of the general commitment to protecting children and armed conflicts. Our meeting should focus on the most practical and appropriate measures to make sure that this commitment are fulfilled and that the place of children is in school and not in armed conflicts.

Let me say at this juncture that, regardless of the situation, any child who is in an armed conflict is by definition a victim. Children must be protected and we should ensure that they do not become victims, soothe them when required and reconstruct their future when necessary.

In this regard, we believe that bold measures should be taken by the international community bearing in mind all the mechanisms, procedures and authority held by the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and making clear the interaction that exists between all areas of intervention, from reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups in society to the inclusion of the protection and well-being of children into all peace processes and peace agreements.

Despite increasing international efforts to prevent all forms of violation against children in armed conflicts, we note that this did not stop children from being the primary victims of conflicts in the recent years. Children with low levels of education are often the easiest targets of armed groups. Therefore, strengthening educational systems in areas of armed conflict should be one of our utmost priorities.

Girls in particular are under the constant threat of sexual violence and other forms of abuse in conflict situations. They are often deprived of education rights, raped and forced into marriage. We should, therefore, continue to give specific

attention to the protection of girls as they are at greater risk of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuses.

Long-standing peace will never be achieved unless we give children the means, skills and education to rebuild a society and institutions torn apart by armed conflict. That is why, prevention strategies are required and should start with tackling the root causes of such conflicts and forced displacement. It should also start with strengthening the human right mandate of United Nations peacekeeping Missions in conflict affected areas, allowing them to report on human rights violation, especially violation of children's rights. Indeed, peacekeeping missions have an important role to play in the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

It is therefore essential that peacekeeping missions receive the necessary training and requisite resources to effectively perform that critical task.

In the context of peacekeeping processes, we strongly believe that specific provisions on the protection of children in armed conflict should be included in all peace negotiations and/or peace agreements. Indeed, for example, the agreements on peace and reconciliation in Mali, signed in Algiers, contains specific provisions related to the protection of children from armed conflict and the engagement of communities to support the return and maintenance of children, especially girls, in schools. Such provisions should inspire all ongoing peace processes.

Moreover, the coordination and cooperation between the United Nations and the regional organizations, especially the African Union, is also an important element of the prevention strategy, to ensure a regional ownership in addressing the root causes of those conflicts and to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflicts.

I would like to take the opportunity of our discussions today to underline the strong commitment of Algeria to the protection of children. It is in this spirit that Algeria has acceded to numerous international and regional legal instruments relating to the rights of the child and the protection of children in armed conflicts, especially the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified in 2009.

Furthermore, in March 2021, Algeria has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, as an additional step in our commitment to protect schools and ensure the education of children in situation of armed conflicts. Our commitment has been crystallized on the ground through the granting of free access to public schools to Malian and Syrian children with the support of the Algerian Government.

Moreover, at the initiative of Algeria during its presidency of the Peace and Security Council in May 2021, the Council has examined the situation of children in armed conflict on the African continent and called the parties involved in armed conflicts to unquestionably adhere to the AU and United Nations calls for a global and continental ceasefire, in order to guarantee the protection of children and ensure their well-being.

Finally, I would like to express Algeria's confidence in Special Representative Mrs Virginia Gamba and her mandate, which we demonstrated recently by joining the Members States platform to elaborate a study on the twenty-fifth anniversary on the evolution of the children and armed conflict mandate. Algeria believes it is essential that the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative be strengthened by providing the political recognition to the work being carried out by this Office and ensuring the appropriate financial and human resources it requires.

Let me conclude by reiterating my country's support to United Nations efforts to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict and to advocate for the promotion and the well-being of all children and civilians in all conflict affected areas.

Annex XXII

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

At the outset, let me commend the Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations for organizing this open debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict.

Andorra aligns itself with the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and wishes to make some remarks in its national capacity.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for their tireless efforts in favor of the most vulnerable. We appreciate the briefers, the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation and the representative of the civil society for their comprehensive presentations today and sharing their insights for a better understanding of the situation on the field and the conditions needed to address and reverse the situation of thousands of children and their communities.

We are appalled by the alarming figures contained in the report of the Secretary-General of 2020 and we would like to join our voice in denouncing the grave violations against children. The year 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place to stop the spread of the virus. A difficult context for the workers on the ground in monitoring and supporting the victims of armed conflicts. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge their dedication and commitment in fulfilling their work in very difficult circumstances.

We would also like to reiterate our full support to the Secretary-General's call to a global ceasefire and we call to all parties in conflict to fully implement resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#) on the implementation of ceasefires and facilitating equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Andorra is deeply concerned by the trends presented in the report and condemns all incidents of the six grave violations presented in the report of the Secretary-General. We are particularly disturbed by the increased attacks against schools, hospitals and other civil infrastructure. Since the COVID-19 pandemic posed a threat in the access of education for millions of girls and boys, the attacks against education and medical facilities are determined to prevent children from enjoying their fundamental human rights. This is unacceptable. They are an attack against their future and wellbeing. We call for full accountability through national and international justice mechanism, such as the International Criminal Court.

Andorra endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, and we invite those who have not yet done so, to do so and fully implement it. Andorra also calls to integrate the Safe Schools Declaration in the Human Rights monitoring mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review.

Furthermore, Andorra endorsed the Paris and Vancouver Principles and is part of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children and armed conflict and call Member States that have not yet done so, to consider ratify this instrument in order to advance to its universalization.

Andorra wishes to express its deep appreciation for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in a year when we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of her mandate. We recognize its essential work in involving parties in conflict in engaging constructively to prevent violence against children. In this

regard, we welcome the action plans signed this year and the commitments made by parties to the conflicts with the support of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

We would also like to commend the work of the Office in supporting actions and policies for the reintegration of victims of armed conflict to their own life, to their communities, helping them against stigma, and recovering education to fulfil their future. We commend the initiatives and actions already undertaken to promote their education and support their mental health after so many abuses.

Andorra shares the concern for better funding the efforts and building capacity for the workers in care of the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. Andorra is a regular donor of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF and will keep its commitment in providing resources to support the most vulnerable. In this regard, we wish to recognize the importance of collecting disaggregated data and to integrate the gender perspective in the response and support of the victims and in all its aspects.

To conclude, let me reiterate Andorra's full support to the mandate and work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. We must join our efforts to protect the most vulnerable in conflict, for their present and future.

Annex XXIII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations, María del Carmen Squeff

[Original: Spanish]

Argentina thanks the Government of Estonia for organizing this open debate on such an important topic as the comprehensive protection of children in armed conflict. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for preparing his latest report on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)) and to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Henrietta Fore, for her briefing.

Argentina shares the Secretary-General's serious concern that in 2020 the situation of children in armed conflict was marked by a sustained high number of grave violations. The largest number of violations related to the recruitment and use of children, murder and mutilation. There was an alarming increase in verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children, by 90 and 70 per cent respectively. Abduction is often combined with the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence. There were also a high number of incidents of denial of humanitarian access and an increase in attacks on schools.

Deeply concerned about the adverse impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on children affected by armed conflict, we join the call of the Security Council in its resolution [2565 \(2021\)](#) for an immediate and comprehensive cessation of hostilities to facilitate the unimpeded distribution and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines in areas of armed conflict.

Argentina firmly supports the Organization's efforts to prevent and halt grave violations of children's rights in contexts 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 Security Council 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.

We appreciate the important work undertaken in the framework of the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed 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.

It is necessary to recognize the increased exposure of girls 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 strongly condemns attacks on schools and hospitals. 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.

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 109 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.

Parties to armed conflict must immediately cease unlawful attacks on schools and incorporate the “Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict” into military doctrine, operational frameworks, codes of conduct and training.

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 reiterate our concern at the scale and severity of the grave violations committed against children. We call on all parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law and to put an immediate end to serious violations.

Annex XXIV

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

I would like to thank the Estonian presidency for convening the Security Council open debate on the theme of children and armed conflict. The presence of the President of the Republic of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid at the meeting attests the importance, which Estonia attaches to the topic of protection of children in the situation of armed conflicts. We thank Secretary-General António Guterres, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, and other speakers their comprehensive presentations highlighting the challenges related to the protection of children in armed conflict.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict creates a momentum to take stock of the progress made in the protection of children and identify gaps and challenges in this regard.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the suffering of children affected by conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, multiplying the protection risks and life-saving needs. We are strongly concerned by the high number of grave violations, as reflected in the recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, including recruitment and use, killing and maiming and denial of humanitarian access. It underscores the imperative of amplifying the efforts of the international community to identify and respond to the violations of the international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Despite the wide endorsement of the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire, the last year was marked by escalation of violence and hostilities in number of regions, accompanied with attacks on schools and hospitals, which aggravated existing vulnerabilities of children, trapped in conflict, hampered their access to education, health and social services.

The war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020, amidst the global pandemic caused immense suffering, destruction, displacement of thousands of people and inflicted a major humanitarian crisis. Among the 90,000 displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh, 88 per cent were women and children. Deliberate air bombardments, artillery and missile strikes heavily damaged a number of medical facilities, including the maternity ward of Stepanakert's Maternal and Child Health Center. Targeted attacks on educational institutions led to the destruction of 18 schools and 6 kindergartens in Artsakh, depriving 28,000 children of their right to education. The violations of humanitarian law by Azerbaijan have been widely documented by various international humanitarian and human rights organizations.

In the aftermath of the aggression, hundreds of cluster bomblets and sub-munitions and other explosive remnants of war spread across civilian settlements and agricultural lands continue to cause serious security risk to the lives of civilians, in particular children with a long-lasting adverse effect on the humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Denial of safe and unhindered humanitarian access of the United Nations agencies to the conflict zone by Azerbaijan undermines comprehensive assessment of the humanitarian, protection and early recovery needs and human rights situation of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh and ensuring of protection of child's rights and enabling access to inclusive and quality education, healthcare and social services.

A source of particular concern is involving of children in state-sponsored propaganda of hatred on ethnic and religious grounds. Educational curricula in kindergartens and schools and school textbooks in Azerbaijan are aimed at indoctrinating of children with armenophobia and inciting violence and intolerance. Opening of the “military trophy park”, propagating vilifying images of ethnic Armenians and exposing it to children is yet another manifestation of systemic policy aimed at dehumanizing Armenians.

Armenia reiterates its commitment to the goals, objectives and principles enshrined in the Safe School declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles, which are crucial instruments to promote and protect the rights and the dignity of all children, in particular those residing in conflict areas and prevent grave violations. We fully support the mandate of the Special Representative, Virginia Gamba, in streamlining the agenda of Children and Armed Conflicts in activities of the United Nations agencies and promoting cooperation with regional organizations, civil society and other stakeholders aimed at ensuring effective protection on the ground.

Annex XXV

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Austria

Austria would like to thank Estonia for convening this open debate. Austria fully aligns itself with the statements of the European Union as well as the Group of Friends of children and armed conflict, and shares the following lines in its national capacity:

We thank the Secretary-General for the report. We commend the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and we pay tribute to the members of the country task forces of the monitoring and reporting mechanism who collect information, often risking their lives. We strongly condemn all forms of intimidation, violence and attacks against child protection advisers, monitoring teams and all other involved stakeholders. The data generated through the monitoring and reporting mechanism has fostered accountability and has 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 United Nations children and armed conflict mandate. At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict Mandate and in the midst of a global pandemic, which has hit children disproportionately affected by armed conflict, Austria underlines its support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and all stakeholders involved in protecting children and preventing them from violence in situation of armed conflict.

The 26,425 grave violations documented in the report and committed by all parties to conflict, both armed groups as well as government forces are appalling. The reported attacks against schools, hospitals and protected personnel are also deeply concerning as well as the denial of humanitarian assistance.

The breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and refugee law in all verified country situations need to be investigated. 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.

Austria is convinced, that parties to conflict can prevent crimes against children and protect children by abiding by their international law obligations as well as the comprehensive set of existing principles and commitments aimed at protecting boys and girls affected by the scourge of war. We welcome the adoption of several new action plans by parties to conflict as well as measures to enforce criminal justice to protect children in armed conflict. We encourage all Member States, which have not yet 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 and to endorse the Vancouver Principles, the Paris Principles and Commitments, and the Safe Schools Declaration.

The 12,643 children released from armed groups and armed forces in 2020 are a sign of hope and we applaud the efforts of the -Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and country task-forces with parties to conflict in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic to free these children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed children to an increased vulnerability and it has also put the protection and monitoring systems under pressure. This global health crisis should be a reminder that we need a robust child protection system, in particular through a strong mandate for and sustainable funding of child protection advisers and country task forces in United Nations Peacekeeping operations and

special political missions. Austria will continue to advocate in the General Assembly for a sufficient level of financing to the United Nations child protection advisers to support the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the children and armed conflict mandate. On a national level, child protection is part of pre-deployment training of all Austrian peacekeepers.

We thank Estonia for focusing the open debate on a gender perspective in child protection. We welcome the recommendations of the report of the Secretary-General on that issue, which underlines that a gender-sensitive protection scheme is necessary to address the particular situation of girls affected by armed conflict in a sustainable way. We also welcome the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten. Austria is actively engaged through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's International Network for Conflict and Fragility to foster a systematic gender-sensitive approach to all humanitarian and conflict prevention measures, with a particular focus to deliver the appropriate assistance in situations of conflict-related sexual violence.

The high number of killed and maimed children due to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas remains a grave concern for Austria – recent conflicts have brought the humanitarian harm associated with the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to light once more. Children are affected not only from the direct impact of explosive weapons but also from the longer-term impacts on physical and mental health as well as from the destruction of infrastructure essential to children's development. One example of this is Water and Sanitation infrastructure where the impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has been highlighted by UNICEF in its recent report "Water under fire". We welcome the progress achieved within the process of the elaboration of a political declaration on this subject in which we remain fully and constructively engaged. We look forward to its successful conclusion with a strong declaration.

In the past years, Austrian Development Cooperation has supported projects seeking to reduce the threat of violence against children. Austrian Development Cooperation has carried out a project in 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 former African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur in facilitating dialogue between the conflict parties.

Reintegration and education programmes are paramount to create sustainable peace for each individual child and for the communities affected by conflict.

Annex XXVI

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United Nations, Jamal Fares Alrowaiei

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I should like to welcome President Kersti Kaljulaid of the Republic of Estonia as chair and to thank the delegation of Estonia for convening this important session on children and armed conflict in view of the continuing vulnerability of children to grave violations caused by the escalation in armed conflict and clashes and the serious humanitarian crises left in their wake, which have been aggravated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

I should also like to thank His Excellency António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Her Excellency Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as all the speakers for their valuable briefings.

The year 2021 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict by the General Assembly, pursuant to its resolution [51/77](#), reflecting the international community's awareness of the plight of children in situations of armed conflict. Efforts aimed at strengthening protection for children affected by armed conflict and promoting international cooperation to put an end to the grave violations committed against them have acquired greater importance today than at any time previously in view of the rise in conflict and violence around the world, including atrocities committed by militias and terrorist organizations in blatant disregard of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)) draws attention to the grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. Furthermore, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the existing vulnerability of such children by hindering access to education and health and social services, causing cutbacks in child protection activities and reducing the number of safe spaces. Moreover, the social and economic effects of the pandemic have left children affected by armed conflict vulnerable to grave violations, including recruitment, exploitation, abduction and sexual violence. In this regard, the Kingdom of Bahrain supports the heartfelt appeal of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for an immediate global ceasefire.

The Kingdom of Bahrain believes in the importance of basing the protection of children in armed conflict on compliance with international law. As such, international instruments have a major role to play in preventing and ending the grave violations committed against children. Anxious to do all it can to protect children, the Kingdom of Bahrain has acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) and the two optional protocols to the Convention, on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2004).

In his latest report, the Secretary-General welcomes the continuing cooperation between the Saudi-led Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen and Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, within the framework of monitoring implementation of the memorandum of understanding signed with the United Nations to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict in Yemen and its associated action plan.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain underlines the need for the international community to continue to make progress in protecting children in armed conflict by

strengthening action frameworks designed to ensure effective implementation of international resolutions and international law, confidence-building measures, and the resumption of political negotiations, in order to achieve peace and stability in conflict zones and ensure that all children enjoy the right to life, health and education without fear of killing, recruitment, abduction or other forms of violation of rights.

Annex XXVII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Philippe Kridelka

I thank the briefers for their insightful remarks. Belgium aligns itself with the statements of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We congratulate Norway for the excellent work it has done during the first six months of its mandate. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict is in able hands.

Belgium welcomes the annual report and expresses its deepest concern at the high amount of grave violations verified by the United Nations. In particular we are concerned at the dramatic increases in abduction and sexual violence.

I wish to make three points on behalf of Belgium. They concern (1) the mainstreaming of the children and armed conflict agenda across the work of the United Nations system, (2) the importance of dedicated child protection capacity in United Nations missions and (3) the central role of accountability in preventing violations against children affected by armed conflict.

First, the importance of mainstreaming the children and armed conflict agenda. We expect the Security Council to pay due attention to child protection in its mandating and sanctioning decisions and we expect the Fifth Committee to follow through by providing the necessary resources. The conclusions of the children and armed conflict Working Group need systematic follow up both in New York and in the field. We call for the wide dissemination and use of the Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict.

We further call upon all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. We also encourage Member States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and endorse and implement the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles with a view to strengthening the protection of children.

Secondly, Belgium emphasizes the importance of dedicated child protection capacity in United Nations missions. There is no substitute for the specialized expertise of child protection advisers. They are the eyes and ears of the children and armed conflict mandate on the ground. We call for sufficient resources in this regard, both in United Nations field operations and at the United Nations secretariat, and we encourage strengthened regional partnerships on children and armed conflict, for example with the European Union and the African Union.

My third point concerns accountability. Belgium supports the Secretary-General's call to strengthen national accountability measures for violations against children and for strengthened cooperation with international accountability mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court. States have an obligation to end impunity for grave violations against children. To further strengthen the synergies between the International Criminal Court and the children and armed conflict mandate Belgium organized a meeting for the members of the Security Council in which Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and the International Criminal Court Prosecutor briefed last November.

Another powerful instrument for accountability is the listing of parties to conflict by the Secretary-General which should be credible, objective and evidence-

based. The work of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which continued during the COVID-19-pandemic, has been exemplary.

On our side, child protection will continue to be a horizontal priority for Belgium. We are proud to support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict to fulfil its essential mandate. We also support the UNICEF children and armed conflict monitoring and reporting activities, on top of our core funding to UNICEF which amounts to EUR 15 million per year. This will assist the documentation and verification of grave violations. And finally we are mobilizing our diplomatic network in conflict affected areas to raise awareness and improve the follow up of children and armed conflict priorities by local partners.

I conclude by expressing my deepest gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba, and to all child protection actors, be it within the United Nations system, national authorities or civil society, for their dedication to protecting children. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandate, and while the challenges remain formidable, I believe we have jointly played an important role in improving child protection in conflict areas.

Annex XXVIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations

At the outset, Brazil would like to congratulate Estonia for organizing this high level open debate on such an important matter. We would also like to express our appreciation to the briefers for their insightful presentations and to the Secretary-General for his annual report on the matter.

The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the already vulnerable situation of children in conflict situations. It created new challenges to family tracing and reunification, as well as activities for the reintegration of children separated from armed forces and groups. Another worrying factor is the increased risk of infection in prison settings, which is particularly alarming when coupled with the fact that, only in 2020, more than 3,000 children were detained for actual or alleged association with armed groups or for national security reasons. These facts only reinforce the need to treat children primarily as victims and to prioritize non-judicial and non-custodial measures as alternatives to their detention.

Another area that has been negatively affected by COVID-19 is monitoring and reporting. Severe movement restrictions created an additional layer of complexity to verify and prevent violations, due to the lack of in-person contacts in the field. While remote communication was a necessary work adjustment, it will hardly replace the human connection needed to monitor and verify more sensitive violations against children, such as sexual violence or recruitment and use as child soldier. Potential underreporting might in turn lead to additional challenges to design policies aimed at preventing and redressing violations. It also hampers our ability to find solutions that take into account different vulnerabilities of children in conflict settings.

As the report of the Secretary-General rightfully points out, grave violations affect boys and girls differently. While most forced recruitment happens against boys, 98 per cent of sexual violence is perpetrated against girls. Understanding the different impacts of grave violations on boys and girls is key not only to provide adequate support for victims, but also to implement effective prevention strategies. Brazil encourages continued information collection and analysis, including taking into account victims' gender and age, in designing policies for the protection of children in armed conflicts.

Protecting children from the scourge of war is not just a legal requirement or a humanitarian call, but a moral imperative. It is alarming to see that 2020 marked a sustained high number of grave violations against children in conflict situations. With more than 25,000 grave violations verified and a number of crimes that probably went unreported, it is clear that more needs to be done to spare children from the terrible consequences of war. I would like to address three areas that deserve our continued attention.

First, Brazil coincides with the Secretary-General's evaluation, as contained in his report, that it is crucial to provide support for national capacities on child protection. As we all know, States have the primary responsibility to protect their own population. In conflict settings, the capacity of Member States to effectively protect children might be severely impaired, thus requiring additional assistance in building capacity to prevent, monitor and respond to grave violations.

Second, respect for international humanitarian law continues to be one of the most important aspects in ensuring protection of children in armed conflicts. Respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law is an obligation

that precedes the outbreak of a war. It involves proper training on humanitarian law and dissemination of its rules and principles, even in peace times.

Third, accountability is also of utmost importance in prevention of grave violations against children, which more often than not constitute international crimes. By ensuring that perpetrators do not go unpunished, the international community can provide a sense of justice to the victims and also contribute to non-recurrence. In this regard, Brazil coincides with the call in the report of the Secretary-General for Member States to adopt national accountability measures and to cooperate with relevant international accountability mechanisms.

In conclusion, while children do not initiate wars, they are among the ones that suffer their consequences the most. Hence, the most effective way to protect children from the inevitable suffering caused by war is to prevent it in the first place, and to swiftly seek the cessation of ongoing hostilities. Investments in diplomacy, peaceful settlement of disputes and economic and social development are always the best choice, as they also provide children with a telling example of how to resolve disputes through dialogue, not violence or coercion. The international community may count on Brazil, including during its mandate as an elected member of the Council in 2022–2023, 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.

Annex XXIX

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the United Nations

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

I would like to start by commending Estonia for initiating this open debate during its presidency of the United Nations Security Council.

Bulgaria took part in the Arria-formula meeting on “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict” in May 2021, and welcomes such consistent efforts to draw the Council’s attention to the agenda on children and armed conflict.

As UNICEF is commemorating its seventy-fifth anniversary and we are marking 25 years since the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Bulgaria would like to reiterate its support to the abovementioned. The children and armed conflict agenda has greatly benefited from the tools under mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, like the annual reports, which contain an annex with listings of parties that have committed grave violations, but also the action plans and the Security Council Working Group on children and armed conflict.

According to this year’s (2021) report on children and armed conflict, there is a deeply concerning number of grave violations, affecting a staggering total of 19,379 children. We are appalled by the increase in verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence, whereby 98 percent of all reported cases affect girls. Moreover, the significant rise in the number of child abductions is shocking and this worrisome context is underpinned by the fact that many violations remain underreported, especially the ones related to sexual violence.

In May 2021 the Office of the Special Representative presented a detailed study on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the violations against children in situations of armed conflict. The dire consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s well-being and their rights, including their access to education and health, are particularly concerning for those in vulnerable situations.

While we were witnessing the closures of schools and other education facilities, school attacks still persist. Inclusive education is atop of Bulgaria’s human rights agenda and we have been working and promoting the “Inclusive education of children with disabilities” as one of our main priorities, including through our official development assistance. However, school closures also have a negative impact on violence against children, including child, early and forced marriage, as well as child labour. This is alarming, bearing 2021 is the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. Therefore, as we are deeply concerned that education is still inaccessible to many children, due to reasons ranging from the digital divide to the lack of security, and we call upon States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

Bulgaria supports the call by the Secretary-General to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as access to services by children, in order to provide assistance to children, and to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and assets. We also welcome the call to immediately end all grave violations against children, while safeguarding human rights.

As recommended in the 2021 report, Bulgaria’s commitment to counter the involvement of children in armed conflicts and to protect those affected is objectified by the ratification of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (ILO Convention No. 182) and the ratification Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the

Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Moreover, Bulgaria has subscribed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. We also support the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to introduce a ban on sales on end-use weapons in countries where there are reports about the involvement of children in conflicts.

Bulgaria encourages all Member States to strengthen child protection, while fostering the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda. The Agenda 2030 identifies children as critical agents of change and we need to ensure the protection of their human rights.

Annex XXX

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations

[Original: French]

Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the past year has been one like no other, with significant setbacks around the world to the hard-won progress in defending the rights of children affected by conflict.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and South Sudan, for example, children are still being recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups. In Afghanistan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Syria, children continue to be killed and maimed. And, while not covered in the report of the Secretary-General, the credible reports of widespread sexual violence against children, particularly girls, in Tigray, Ethiopia, are deeply disturbing.

Moreover, contrary to international law, attacks against schools and hospitals have occurred or are ongoing in Cameroon, Nigeria, Syria, and elsewhere. We condemn in the strongest terms the deliberate strikes against a medical facility in Atarib, northern Aleppo, Syria, in March 2021, and the June 2021 attack on Shifa' Hospital in Afrin that killed and injured several children.

Such trends are not only concerning; in our eyes they are unacceptable. Canada condemns all grave violations committed against children and we will continue working with partners to help prevent and end such violations, including by holding perpetrators accountable.

Canada strongly supports the impartiality and independence of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict, which is one of the most critical tools in promoting truth and accountability for grave violations against children.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism's work, and the children and armed conflict agenda, are strengthened by the application of clear, consistent, and evidence-based criteria in the listing and de-listing of parties responsible for grave violations against children.

Canada will continue to advocate for these principles to be upheld to the highest standard, including in its capacity as chair of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York.

In addition to working on the issue at the United Nations, Canada co-chairs Groups of Friends in Colombia, Philippines, South Sudan, and Sudan; a testament to its global commitment and engagement in support of the children and armed conflict agenda.

The Group of Friends in South Sudan, co-chaired by Canada and South Africa, advocates for and supports South Sudan in implementing its Comprehensive Action Plan to end and prevent all grave violations against children, and encourages South Sudan to endorse key instruments, like the Vancouver Principles.

In Colombia, as co-chairs the Group of Friends, Canada and Sweden conducted virtual visits to assess the situation facing children in areas of the country where recruitment is on the rise due to COVID-19.

We remain committed to help build stronger links and synergies between these groups to support the children and armed conflict agenda around the world.

Since their launch in 2017, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers have been endorsed by an ever-growing number of United Nations Member States.

So far, 102 countries have formally committed to working to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers in places where United Nations peacekeeping missions operate. This commitment takes many forms, from providing adequate training to their own peacekeepers, to ensuring that peacekeeping missions are adequately resourced to address recruitment and use of children.

Canada recognizes and congratulates those countries that have endorsed the Principles since the last Security Council open debate on children in armed conflict in 2020, namely, Qatar, Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Comoros, Ghana, and Togo. We hope that even more United Nations Member States will join us in reinforcing the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers through peacekeeping.

We also look forward to advancing the concrete implementation of the Vancouver Principles in all aspects of United Nations peacekeeping. At the national level, the Canadian Armed Forces Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security is facilitating implementation of the Vancouver Principles. Key to this is the development of doctrine that outlines the range of tasks the military can perform in preventing the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. These tasks, informed by research and consultation with civil society actors, will influence policy, processes and training of Canadian military peacekeepers, making them better prepared to prevent recruitment. We look forward to sharing this with other partners.

It is imperative that we work together to better align peacekeeping mandates with resources, including dedicated child protection capacity and expertise. Encouragingly, the latest report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations calls for the swift deployment of senior child protection advisers and teams to United Nations peacekeeping operations. As members of the United Nations General Assembly's Fifth Committee, currently studying peacekeeping budgets, we have an opportunity to ensure that child protection remains a priority, particularly for missions that have specific child protection mandates.

Canada reiterates its strong support for these specialized protection actors, who contribute to early warning and comprehensive, integrated, and gender-sensitive responses.

Canada will continue to use its voice and provide resources to ensure that children are adequately protected in situations of armed conflict.

For instance, in Cameroon, Canada's funding to Plan International helps address urgent humanitarian needs of up to 20,380 internally-displaced persons and other conflict-affected people, of which approximately 9,500 are boys and girls. This includes the establishment of community-based safe spaces and structures, the delivery of comprehensive age- and gender-responsive and inclusive case management support services to vulnerable children, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and the delivery of family tracing and reunification support to unaccompanied and separated children.

In South Sudan, Canada is supporting a project led by the Dallaire Institute to build the capacity of security sector actors to prioritize the issue of child soldiers, prevent the recruitment of children, and prevent sexual violence perpetrated against child associated with armed groups. Since inception, the project has reached 5,031 members of South Sudan's unified forces. The project also involves working closely with South Sudanese civil society and women-led organizations to prevent at-risk boys and girls from being recruited as child soldiers.

We look forward to continuing to work with our partners around the world to help put an end to grave violations against children affected by conflict, no matter where they occur.

Annex XXXI

Statement by the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict

[Original: French]

This statement is submitted by the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), an informal, cross-regional network of 47 Member States and the European Union.¹ We welcome today's open debate convened by Estonia and thank the briefers for their statements.

We express our deep appreciation for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate, and look forward to continued constructive engagement at this important moment of reflection.

We extend our sincere thanks to all child protection actors, in particular from the United Nations and civil society, who often work at great risk to themselves to protect children and support their resilience and recovery during periods of conflict and violence. We thank Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict in particular, and congratulate the organization on its twentieth anniversary.

The Group of Friends welcomes the Secretary-General's annual report, while expressing serious concern with the scale and scope of the 26,425 grave violations which affected 19,379 children, particularly amidst the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We remain deeply concerned about the multi-faceted impacts of COVID-19 on children affected by armed conflict, including those forced to flee or living in detention, as well as on the capacity of the United Nations and other actors to meet the unique and urgent needs of children.

The protection of children must be central in the ongoing response to the pandemic, including through the continuity of child-centred services that include mental-health and psychosocial support, comprehensive reintegration programmes that are gender- and age-sensitive, and inclusive of children with disabilities, and rapid, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access to all children in need.

We reiterate our call for the Security Council and parties to armed conflict to fully implement resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#) on ceasefires and facilitating equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict situations, post-conflict situations, and complex humanitarian emergencies.

The trends presented in the report are disturbing and must be reversed. We are alarmed by the persistently high levels of denial of humanitarian assistance, killing and maiming, and recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict. The dramatic increase in sexual violence is also deeply concerning. This grave violation disproportionately affects girls, while also impacting boys, and is already prone to severe under-reporting.

Furthermore, we are troubled by the dramatic increase in abductions, which can lead to other grave violations. We are also dismayed by widespread attacks against

¹ Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, European Union.

schools and hospitals, particularly amidst the pandemic. Such attacks may not only kill or maim children and endanger their safety. They also destroy or disrupt education and essential health services at a time when these are needed most.

The Group of Friends strongly condemns all incidents of the six grave violations presented in the report of the Secretary-General. We call for full accountability through national and international justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court. True justice also involves reparations and access to gender- and age-sensitive comprehensive specialized services, which includes but is not limited to medical, mental and psycho-social and health services, including sexual and reproductive health-care services, and legal and livelihood support to survivors of grave violations, whose trauma may endure for years.

Furthermore, we call upon all parties to armed conflict fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law, and refugee law, and to prevent and end grave violations.

To this end, we strongly encourage all parties to armed conflict to sign, develop and implement action plans and other concrete, time-bound, and effective protection measures for children in armed conflict, such as road maps, command orders, and other commitments. We welcome the signing and implementation of such measures during 2020, and call for further progress during 2021.

Additionally, we note that a growing number of Member States have acceded to or endorsed key instruments aimed at strengthening the protection of children in armed conflict. We encourage all Member States to strengthen the protection of children, including by considering acceding to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and by considering endorsing and implementing practical protection tools, notably the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Vancouver Principles.

There is no substitute for the specialized expertise of dedicated child protection capacities. The Group of Friends stresses the importance of providing adequate resourcing for child protection personnel and activities, including and in particular within United Nations peace operations, United Nations Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Secretariat.

United Nations peace operations play an important role in protecting children in armed conflict. We strongly encourage the Security Council and Member States to support the full implementation of strong child protection mandates, including through the speedy deployment of senior child protection advisers and teams, and by prioritizing the protection of children in peacekeeping transitions.

We fully support mainstreaming the children and armed conflict agenda in the work of the Security Council, including in mandate renewals, peace processes, and sanctions regimes. We thank Norway for its efforts as Chair of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict, and welcome the engagement of the Working Group to deliver on its ambitious mandate. We encourage more regular reporting from the Secretary-General to the Security Council, and call for the full implementation of conclusions reached by the Working Group, as well as systematic follow-up in this regard, which we commit to support.

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, we express our full support for the range of tools at our disposal to enhance the protection for children in armed conflict. We look forward to strengthening these tools.

In this regard, we reiterate the importance that we attach to the independence, impartiality, and credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict, as established by resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#).

The information presented in the report of the Secretary-General, as collected and verified through the monitoring and reporting mechanism, should be accurately reflected in the annexes of the report. We further recall the importance of the criteria and procedures for listing and de-listing parties to armed conflict deemed responsible for committing grave violations outlined in report [A/64/742-S/2010/181](#).

Finally, we once again call upon the Secretary-General to ensure that annual reports on this important issue are released to Member States early.

Annex XXXII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

Chile presents its compliments to the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson, and aligns itself with the statement made by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Chile welcomes the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, which highlights the critical situation of children in that context in a year in which they have been affected by the closure of schools and continue to be at high risk of being recruited by armed actors. The figures are alarming, with a total of 26,426 grave violations committed against children in armed conflict, approximately 1,400 more than was reported the year before.

We must bear in mind that children are the vital foundation for building a prosperous future for the world, which is why protecting them and safeguarding their rights is a moral imperative for the international community. This is especially relevant given the complex situation caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has led to a radicalization of conflicts and has caused an unprecedented global crisis in education, a field in which schools have suffered continuous attacks or been used for military purposes.

Against that backdrop, Chile, as a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration, reiterates the importance of protecting schools from attack so as to ensure that children become agents of change in the future, when the world will benefit from their contribution to their communities towards sustained peace.

In that context, we call on all parties to conflict to respect international law, including international humanitarian law, and to refrain from targeting infrastructure that is essential to the survival of civilians in conflict situations, in particular children's facilities, hospitals and schools, as well as humanitarian and medical personnel. We also recognize the importance of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as practical protection instruments, in particular the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

Chile also recognizes the specific consequences of conflict on young and adolescent girls. With the suspension of community-based child protection and essential services, reduced mobility and the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, 98 per cent of child victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence were girls. Chile strongly condemns the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

In this regard, we highlight the importance of implementing a gender-sensitive approach to child protection mandates to prevent and address the occurrence of one or more of the six violations – killing and maiming, recruitment or use of children as soldiers, attacks against schools and hospitals, sexual violence, abduction and denial of humanitarian assistance – using a trauma-informed, child-centred and survivor-centred approach.

The effects of conflict are often felt the hardest by children, who may lose their families and friends and often suffer serious physical and psychological harm as a result of egregious violations of their fundamental human rights.

In this context, we recognize that children, in particular those associated with armed forces or groups and former child soldiers, should be treated as victims – not actors – of conflict. It is therefore necessary to support them in their reintegration into

society so that they can be empowered to heal and move on from their painful past experience, and in so doing prevent them from becoming part of the cycles of violence that fuel conflict.

We also encourage the Security Council and Member States to support the implementation of child protection mandates to ensure adequate priority is given to the protection of children in peacekeeping operations.

In this regard, we reiterate that the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict is vital not only to understand the situation of children on the ground who have been victims of one or more of the six grave violations, but also to ensure accountability of perpetrators. Chile appreciates that, despite the constraints caused by the pandemic, the United Nations teams in the affected countries have been able to continue their monitoring and reporting work.

We reiterate the importance of maintaining the independence, impartiality and credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established by Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#). The information presented in the report of the Secretary-General, collected and verified through the mechanism, should be accurately reflected in the annexes of the report.

Most importantly, we owe it to these brave children to keep seeking solutions. We must continue to strengthen an integrated and synergistic response that contributes to building resilient societies that support children from the outset of conflict to the stage of repairing cycles of violence, which we hope will enable these children to shift from being victims to contributors and drivers of change.

Annex XXXIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations, Guillermo Fernández de Soto**

[Original: Spanish]

We welcome the convening of this open debate by Estonia as President of the Security Council for the month of June 2021.

The Colombian State believes that comprehensive care for children and adolescents is a fundamental pillar of its “peace with legality” policy.

Children and adolescents will continue to be a priority for the national Government, as established in the national development plan for 2018–2022. Colombia seeks to expand comprehensive care from early childhood to adolescence, improving the targeting of policies and focusing efforts on the family as the most immediate environmental setting for children’s development and well-being.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a strong impact on the various dynamics and realities in the territories affected by the conflict. Strategies launched by the national Government are therefore intended to safeguard the rights of children and adolescents before, during and after the pandemic.

The security forces play a key role in protecting and guaranteeing the rights of children, especially in contexts of armed violence, in which State bodies are responsible for establishing the initial link or contact with a child who has been rescued on the ground.

Strengthening security forces’ training and knowledge in the field of human rights and international humanitarian law, particularly with regard to violence and its effects on the integral development of children, contributes to the creation of peaceful and safe environments that provide protection and reparation for those who suffer from such violence.

In this context, the national Government launched a national plan to train more than 250,000 members of the security forces. The plan, developed in the framework of the “Pact: Colombia with Youth” initiative, under which more than 202 working groups have been formed, has more than 5,500 young participants in 25 departments of the country.

It is important to recognize the multiple effects of violence in order to achieve gender equality, which is why progressive, comprehensive and differential actions must be taken to address the reality of women, girls and adolescents in our country.

Guaranteeing access to justice for women and girls who have suffered some form of violence in the context of the conflict is a pressing obligation. Priority must be given to investigating the facts and initiating judicial proceedings, adopting measures to guarantee the privacy, confidentiality and security of victims and establishing comprehensive reparation mechanisms, in particular when the victim is a child or adolescent.

Pursuant to resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#), Colombia is making progress in improving effective mechanisms to prevent recruitment, including through the Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Children and Adolescents by Illegal Armed Groups and Organized Criminal Groups, which has helped to identify risk factors and coordinate State action.

The twenty-fourth ordinary session of the Intersectoral Commission, during which the institutions that make up that body will report on the progress made in the implementation of the “Join for me” strategy, is being held on 28 June 2021.

According to complaints filed with the Attorney General's Office, between 26 September 2016 and 31 December 2020, reports were received on 1426 victims of forced recruitment, 339 of whom were child and adolescent victims of unlawful recruitment and 1087 were victims of use for the commission of a crime.

According to figures provided by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, between the signing of the Peace Agreement with Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) in 2016 and 31 December 2020, the main recruiters of children in the country in the recent past have been the residual organized armed groups of FARC-EP, responsible for 40 per cent of cases (182 cases); Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), responsible for 35 per cent of cases (160 cases); organized criminal groups, responsible for 21 per cent of cases (99 cases); and other organized armed groups, such as the Pelusos, with 3 per cent of cases (13 cases). The responsibility for 1 per cent of cases (6 cases) has yet to be established.

Unfortunately, despite the Government's efforts, all organized armed groups continue to recruit and use children in violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming, once again, the commitment of Colombia to building an increasingly prosperous and secure future for children and adolescents.

Annex XXXIV

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Maritza Chan

Costa Rica aligns itself with the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children in Armed Conflict. There is no act of war that does not in some way harm children. Costa Rica looks forward to a frank and results-oriented discussion of why we continue to allow this to happen, and how some of our most vulnerable constituents can be better protected.

On this note, Costa Rica would like to raise the following points:

First, Costa Rica stresses that robust and effective arms control mechanisms are critical to preventing conflict – and, synergistically, also key to protecting children. According to the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on promotion and protection of the right of children: children and armed conflict, we recognize that causes of child casualties include crossfire from small arms and light weapons, landmines and other unexploded ordnance and ground engagement between conflict parties. Indeed, many conflicts that kill and injure children are only possible if illicit arms remain in circulation, in the wrong hands, or misused by non-State and State actors alike. Armed conflict is increasingly protracted and complex, exacerbated by climate change-related risks, malevolent uses of technology, and transnational organized crime. But despite these variables, small arms and light weapons remain a constant scourge across virtually all societies. It is thus imperative that robust and effectively – particularly for standards of trade and transfer – be a focal point of our discussion.

Second, Costa Rica draws attention to the troubling use of explosive devices in densely populated urban areas. Rapid urbanization raises the possibility that armed conflict is increasingly engaged in city centers: Explosives built for remote battlefields are now bombarding children in packed apartments. Such violence comprises serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and represents a collective failure to mitigate harm especially to children. Costa Rica wishes to make it clear: It is neither a principled nor pragmatic strategy for conflict parties to use explosive weapons in areas where children are likely to be victimized.

And we know that the harm from explosive weapons in densely populated areas does not end after detonation: Damage to civilian infrastructure and community resources reverberates for years. The health and even lives of children are directly imperilled when water, sanitation, and other essential infrastructure services are disrupted. Such additive impacts must be avoided at all costs – as per human rights and humanitarian law – and should be factored into all proportionality and necessity tests before conflict parties resort to violent means.

Schools also continue to be targeted by explosive devices, eroding their sanctity as safe spaces and putting children and their families at risk. In Myanmar, for example, the Secretary-General report verified the military use of 30 schools by the Tatmadaw. Eleven schools were attacked outright. An attack on a school is not just about damage to a facility; it is an attack on children's rights as well as on their communities, social networks, health, and well-being.

Lastly, Costa Rica emphasizes how conflict also puts children at heightened risk of recruitment, abduction, and trafficking. When their schools, social support networks, and safe spaces are disrupted, when essential infrastructure is damaged or destroyed, children become particularly vulnerable to nefarious actors. Indeed, the most prevalent grave violation listed in the report of the Secretary-General was the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, referencing a jaw-dropping 8,521 children. The report also outlines how abduction and sexual violence can often

become the consequences of child recruitment. The report of the Secretary-General makes clear that offenses against children intertwine, adding even greater impetus to stop putting children in harm's way.

No child leaves conflict zones unscarred: physically, emotionally, socially, mentally. Their protection is thus an ethical, moral, and legal imperative. Moving forward, Costa Rica maintains that United Nations peacekeeping missions should feature child-specific protection training, and that the child protection budget must be boosted in the Fifth Committee. It is also essential that the reports of the Secretary-General reflect the most impartial, accurate, and courageous assessments; to do otherwise can have deadly consequences for children. Costa Rica looks forward to a results-oriented and frank discussion of how our most vulnerable citizens can stay safe, especially in conflict settings.

Annex XXXV

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations, José Alfonso Conde

I thank the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, Henrietta Fore, Forest Whitaker and Laban Onisimus for sharing their important perspectives.

The Dominican Republic fully supports the recommendations presented by the Secretary-General in his report.

Moreover, we recognize the essential work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and of UNICEF, including through their engagement with parties to conflict resulting in the adoption of measures to better protect children from hostilities, such as the release of 12,643 children from armed groups and armed forces on 2020.

As we continue to make efforts to remain positive, the reality is that, despite advancement achieved, the picture that the reports draws year after year on the situation of children in armed conflict, remains terrifying. Violence and conflict continue to have a devastating and disproportionate impact on children.

Children that require our utmost attention and unwavering commitment.

This year's report registers an alarming 23,946 grave violations and has shown a massive spike in the number of children abducted, by 90 per cent, and sexually abused in conflict, by 70 per cent.

We are deeply concerned by the increase of these violations, many perpetrated by parties that have signed action plans with the United Nations.

According to the report of the Secretary-General, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are the most dangerous places for children at this moment.

Afghanistan remains the deadliest conflict for children.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with its rising insecurities, children are more vulnerable to abuse, human trafficking and recruitment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated children's existing vulnerabilities, including by hindering their access to education, health and social services.

In addition to the mass school closures, attacks on schools have increased, impacting children's future.

The Dominican Republic condemns these violations and urges parties to conflicts to comply with their obligations under international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law and to adhere to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire.

Despite the heavy impact the pandemic has imposed on the monitoring and reporting mechanism operations pertaining grave violations against children in armed conflict, it continues to provide us with a better understanding of the situation on the ground as a basis to guide effective action towards protecting children.

Once again, we emphasize our 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 annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

In that same line, we must continue to support United Nations child protection advisers, and make sure such positions are fully funded and given the appropriate seniority.

Protecting children requires a collective response.

The briefers' observations and recommendations are meant to leave this debate translated into concrete action by the Security Council.

Being the main goal to break the cycle of violence, it becomes crucial that all the pillars of child protection are taken into account in the context of all relevant activities of the United Nations, Governments and stakeholders, carried out during conflict prevention, as well as in conflict and post-conflict situations, including through the strengthening of child protection mechanisms, and by adopting measures and assuming greater commitments, mainly with reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, and with action plans to protect children.

During its tenure in the Security Council, the Dominican Republic kept the protection of children in armed conflict high in our priorities and we will continue to do so, including through the different endorsements made by our country, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles, as well as through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

As we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, we want to reiterate the strong support of the Dominican Republic to the agenda and mandate.

As the report clearly signals us, it is a "Stolen childhood and a future to repair".

Therefore, let us not lose sight of the fact that accountability for all violations and abuses against children is at the heart of the children and armed conflict agenda.

Annex XXXVI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations, Cristian Espinosa**

[Original: Spanish]

I would like to thank Henrietta Fore, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Forest Whitaker of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and Laban Onisimus of Plan International for their presentations. I also welcome the presentation by the Secretary-General, António Guterres, describing the vulnerable situation of children in armed conflict.

That situation is even more clearly exposed in the report of the Secretary-General of 6 May 2021 ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), presented pursuant to Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), which covers the period of 2020 and thus reflects the significant impact of the pandemic.

Having joined the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict one year ago, Ecuador aligns itself with the statement by Canada on behalf of that Group. We urge the international community to prioritize efforts to promote and protect the rights of children in all contexts.

We strongly support the implementation of each of the 13 Security Council resolutions on this matter, especially given our concern that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to exacerbate the situation in conflict areas. The 24,000 grave violations reported in the 21 situations covered by the mandate reflect the precarious situation we are facing.

I reiterate the call made by Ecuador in Security Council document [S/2021/415](#) for a halt to attacks on schools and to any form of military use of schools.

Ecuador remains engaged in significant regional efforts against child trafficking and recruitment, which continues to be a global challenge that requires a coordinated response from our Organization.

The best way to commemorate the first anniversary of the Declaration signed by 172 countries in support of the call made by the Secretary-General on 22 June 2020 for a global ceasefire, and the subsequent adoption of Security Council resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#), is by setting up a mechanism to follow up on their implementation, as well as on the implementation of resolution [2565 \(2021\)](#).

Such a mechanism would support efforts to alleviate the suffering of more than 400 million children living in conflict zones.

I would also like to reiterate that the study of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on the impact of COVID-19 on violations against children in armed conflict is a valuable tool for better understanding the challenges on the ground and for strengthening the means of protection, including through digital monitoring measures for prevention and to avoid impunity, as I stated at the Arria formula meeting of the Security Council held on 7 May 2021, also organized by Estonia, in which I recalled that the pandemic had left 500 million children without access to a digital education as a result of connectivity gaps.

On this twenty-fifth anniversary of the submission of the first report on the impact of armed conflict on children, we must redouble our efforts as an Organization in peacebuilding and in managing humanitarian access to conflict zones for the protection of children.

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

At the outset, we would like to thank Estonia for organizing this important high-level open debate regarding children and armed conflicts. We would also extend our thanks to the distinguished briefers for their interesting presentations delivered at the beginning of the session.

Egypt believes in the importance of raising awareness regarding the Human rights issues and its linkage with the realization of peace and security, particularly issues related to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

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

These strong negative impacts of armed conflicts on children were aggravated because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This requires more international cooperation and stronger measures to urgently respond to those exacerbated impacts. In this regard, Egypt expressed on the highest level to the United Nations its willingness to cooperate, to the utmost possible extent, in order to ensure the delivery of much needed humanitarian assistance.

Since 2002, Egypt ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Protocol's provisions are a part of our national legislation.

Furthermore, respect of international humanitarian law, including the protection of children in armed conflicts, 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 this curriculum is prepared in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood to ensure the protection of the rights of the child.

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

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

[Original: Spanish]

El Salvador thanks the Estonian presidency for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, and takes note of the latest report of the Secretary-General ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)) on the subject.

My country takes this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as its full willingness to address the harrowing consequences of armed conflict and to help reduce the widespread suffering that it inflicts on the civilian population. It also reaffirms its firm commitment to complying with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a view to ensuring that the best interests of the child remain the priority regardless of the context in which children find themselves.

More than a year after the start of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it is important to measure the full impact it has had on children. Beyond its devastating health impacts, the crisis, which has brought to light existing inequalities, has clearly had profound social, economic and political consequences, with a wide-ranging impact on the most vulnerable groups, in particular on children affected by armed conflict.

The pandemic situation has weakened the capacity of States to ensure adequate support for preventing and ending acts that contravene relevant international law, and has had a negative impact on the provision of age- and gender-sensitive support services, including psychological, social and health-care services. It has also had a negative effect on education, the prevention of sexual abuse, including the treatment of child victims of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict, and reintegration programmes, while cases of forced recruitment have risen.

Restrictions on the free movement and circulation of people within and between countries, which are among the measures adopted to prevent the spread of COVID-19, have hampered monitoring efforts in various ways, including in terms of compliance with applicable international commitments such as the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the implementation of prevention and reintegration campaigns and activities.

States have also been forced to prioritize the adoption of relevant health measures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a reduction in international funding for direct care for children affected by armed conflict, creating a gap between available resources and the need for health care and medical supplies and materials, as well as health and humanitarian personnel on the ground.

This prompts us to urge States not to take a step backwards but rather to maintain our momentum in improving protection systems and timely and effective humanitarian assistance, even as the world grapples with the consequences of and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the Secretary-General's calls for a ceasefire in March 2020, we have seen conflicts escalate in some regions of the world, which have resulted in attacks on critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, and associated personnel.

El Salvador strongly condemns such attacks, the improper use of civilian facilities and the recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups of children and adolescents to take part in conflicts – acts that go against international humanitarian

law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and various Security Council resolutions.

El Salvador calls upon all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and stresses the importance of providing humanitarian personnel with safe and unhindered access to the civilian population.

In that regard, as a contributor of troops and police to United Nations peace operations and special political missions, El Salvador recognizes the fundamental role of such personnel in the protection of children in conflict situations.

The vulnerability of girls to sexual and gender-based violence has grown as a result of the pandemic and, among other aspects, of the challenges posed in monitoring such violence; social stigma; a lack of comprehensive treatment to provide girl victims with psychological and social care; and a lack of financial resources to support investigations to ensure access to justice in order to redress such crimes in the context of armed conflict. The Security Council and all States members of the United Nations must continue to work on ensuring accountability and ending impunity, guaranteeing procedural mechanisms related to investigations, prosecuting responsible actors and ensuring due reparation and reintegration of victims and survivors. Armed conflict is no justification for not guaranteeing this fundamental human right and freedom. In this regard, El Salvador considers that it is essential, in order to prevent the recurrence of war crimes, to facilitate access to justice for victims and reparations for victims and survivors. Prosecutions for war crimes must include investigating and ultimately convicting those criminally responsible, regardless of who they are and where their crimes took place, all in accordance with applicable international criminal law. My country calls on States to continue to cooperate with international investigative and judicial mechanisms to reduce scenarios of impunity in this regard.

A gender-sensitive approach is needed in all prevention, protection and reparation activities related to children and armed conflict. Such an approach should also be adopted when States and international and regional agencies collect information, present statistical data and formulate responses and policies.

El Salvador is focused on providing care for vulnerable groups, with special attention given to victims and survivors of armed conflict, which is why it highlights the importance of offering psychological support to address the immediate and long-term effects on children living in situations of armed conflict, including the need for continued prosecution of violations committed against them.

It would like to thank the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for 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. It is essential 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.

It reiterates the urgent need to continue to work on strengthening the coordination and cooperation of the United Nations and regional organizations; training members of armed forces and armed groups in international humanitarian law and international human rights law; improving capacities to monitor, investigate, prosecute and convict those guilty of having committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of genocide and other violations of international humanitarian law;

and providing opportunities for reparations and social reintegration for victims and survivors of these scourges.

El Salvador reiterates its firm belief that the most effective way to protect children is to prevent conflict by investing in development, promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes, responding to the needs of post-conflict countries and regions and building stability by promoting a culture of peace and respect for international law.

The protection of civilians must be a priority of the work of the Organization and must override any geopolitical interest that is opposed to it. Genuine protection requires a commitment on the part of all States members of the United Nations to safeguarding the human dignity of all peoples without discrimination.

Annex XXXIX

Statement by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, Silvio Gonzato

I am pleased to submit this statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia,* Montenegro,* Serbia* and Albania,* the country of the stabilization and association process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union thanks the Estonian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this debate and extends its gratitude to the briefers.

The European Union is concerned by the findings of the Secretary-General report that verified 26,425 grave violations, which affected 19,379 children in 21 situations. The continued denial of humanitarian assistance as well as the multiple cases of killing and maiming, the increase of recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict as well as attacks against schools and hospitals are of great concern, too. We are deeply disturbed by and condemn the shocking rise in cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence, a violation that predominantly affects girls and which remains vastly underreported. We are also shocked by the sharp increase in the number of child abductions. In light of these new and worrying trends, combined with the multi-faceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must redouble our joint efforts to protect children.

The European Union urges parties to armed conflicts, state and non-State alike, to immediately end all violations against children and fully implement international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, including by providing for concrete and effective protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected public health systems capacities already strained by armed conflicts, and led to closures of schools and other education facilities. Meanwhile, widespread attacks against schools and hospitals continued and even increased in certain areas. On certain occasions, restrictions were misused to impede the timely and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. We call upon all Governments to allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded access for all frontline medical and humanitarian workers to people in need.

School closures and the closure of other education facilities are of special concern as they have suspended the education of millions, impacting the right to education. For many children, education remains out of reach due to insecurity, the digital divide and a lack of remote learning opportunities in certain contexts. The suspension of education increases the risk of drop-outs, and has led to forced labour and recruitment by armed groups and forces. School closures also reinforce exposure to all forms of violence, including child, early and forced marriage. They can lead to increase the military use of education facilities, which hinders children from resuming their studies. That is why integrating education into the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is important, as it can help to overcome these challenges.

The European Union calls upon Member States and non-State actors to improve access to safe and quality education, in line with General Assembly resolution [74/275](#). The European Union will continue to focus on supporting education in situations of armed conflict and to advocate for unhindered access to education with a particular

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the stabilization and association process.

focus on girls. Tailor-made assistance will facilitate the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups, including mental health and psycho-social support. We underline that the specific needs of girls and children with disabilities require special attention. Sexual and reproductive health-care services, legal and livelihood support and services to survivors of grave violations must also be ensured.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict – a mandate that the European Union strongly supports. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and her Office for their tireless efforts over the past year. It is time to build on the gains made and address future challenges. Child protection must be a central element of prevention, early warning, mediation, and conflict resolution efforts. United Nations peace operations must be mandated and financed accordingly. We thank all child protection actors for their crucial and dedicated work. We call on all Member States to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We welcome other initiatives and instruments that build on the existing framework, such as the Paris Principles and their commitments, the Vancouver Principles. The Safe Schools Declaration is also a valuable tool to this end.

The protection and the promotion of the rights of the child are central to the European Union's human rights policy. The children and armed conflict agenda is included in the 2020–2024 Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and the 2021 European Union Strategy for the Right of the Child. It is mainstreamed across the work of the European Union, including our common security and defence policy missions. The European Union will step up its efforts to ensure meaningful child participation, build, and strengthen child-friendly justice and child protection systems.

Against this background, the European Union calls on the members of the Security Council to deal with children and armed conflict as a matter of priority and with unprecedented dedication. This means concretely: (1) to ensure mainstreaming of the children and armed conflict agenda across the work of the Council; (2) to invite the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to continue her briefings to the Council on relevant country situations; (3) to raise the children and armed conflict agenda, especially child protection, during Security Council visits; and (4) to ensure that child protection is preserved in peace missions, including in transitions, and well budgeted, and it is addressed in relevant mandate discussions of all United Nations missions.

The European Union recognizes the real value and impact of the United Nations children and armed conflict mandate and its tools: the Working Group chaired by Norway, the monitoring and reporting mechanism, the action plans, and the annual report with its annex listing parties to conflicts that have committed grave violations. It is of utmost importance to protect its integrity and impartiality, including the application of the criteria and procedures for listing and de-listing parties. Every year, European Union Member States review the European Union list of priority countries on children and armed conflict, based on the description of the country situations in the Secretary-General 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. The European Union also places high value on accountability, including through the International Criminal Court. Children must be given full access to justice.

The European Union is strongly engaged in the conflict prevention agenda and is dedicated to foster the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic shall not stop us in these efforts. It is important to further operationalize the children and armed conflict agenda and ensure that the right of the child is a priority in all our efforts in building back better.

Annex XL

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Fiji to the United Nations

First of all allow me to congratulate Estonia on its successful presidency of the Security Council.

In 1990 the Convention of the Rights of the Child came into force. There are now 196 state parties to the Convention. The United Nations Office of the Special Representative for children and armed conflict was established by Member States in 1996, recognizing the importance of the issue. Security Council resolution [1261 \(1999\)](#), recognized that the situation of children in armed conflict affects international peace and security, and directed the Secretary-General to report annually on the situation. Since then, there have been 12 resolutions by the Security Council relating to the protection of children in armed conflicts.

But each year, the reports of the Secretary-General and the Special Representative continue to highlight the plight, and grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflicts around the world. Their numbers are clearly increasing. Something is so obviously not right. The numbers of children affected by conflicts where the United Nations does not have a mandate is unclear. This is a failing that needs to be set right.

While international regimes are in place to protect and reduce the impact of armed conflicts on children, their implementation continues to be, sadly, a growing challenge. The report of the Secretary-General highlights that there is a "sustained high number of grave violations." Addressing this is an urgent task before this United Nations Security Council. The trends highlight a systemic record of children being exploited, killed, abducted, denied humanitarian access, subjected to sexual violence; all perpetrated by adults and many having the protection of Governments and competent authorities. All of these are compounded by the COVID-19 crisis.

To give peace operations a better chance of success, Fiji wholeheartedly supports the call by the Secretary-General on 23 March 2021, for an immediate global ceasefire so the world could focus its effort to combatting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruptions to mediation of conflicts, and peacebuilding efforts by international, regional, and local communities. The pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities worsening the situations in conflict areas. This has disproportionately affected women and children the most.

Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's ceasefire call was not heeded. International and local communities lost a major opportunity to reduce the suffering of children, and to save more children's lives. The worst of the pandemic still lies ahead for most developing countries. There is time still.

Fiji would like to highlight the following:

The report of the Secretary-General of 2020 highlights that a third of violations reported are carried out by Governments and international forces. This can and must stop urgently.

Non-State actors in the conflict space continue to be the major violators of international laws on the protection of children. The United Nations system and its peace operations have a significant role to play in ensuring that non-State actors are made aware of their obligations unambiguously. There can be no impunity.

The Security Council has within its authority the means to implement preventative measures. These include imposing and maintaining ceasefires; ending impunity by making violators accountable for their actions through sanctions,

embargoes, and tribunals. The Security Council needs to take a more proactive approach to protection mandates for peacekeeping missions to address escalating violations.

The United Nations and the International community have recognized that development and peace are closely linked. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is aimed at addressing the root causes of conflicts in communities, and leaving no one behind. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will need the support of the whole of the United Nations system.

The Peacebuilding Commission is playing a critical role in prevention and peacebuilding. The PBC continues to act as a bridge between the United Nations organs, key stakeholders, and those in the field. The Peacebuilding fund requires predictable and sustainable funding to support the work of the PBC. Its ability to finance broader interventions aimed at protecting and saving children in conflict affected regions are substantial.

Peacekeepers are best positioned to respond to protecting children in armed conflicts due to their presence in conflict areas, and resources. Child protection advisers in United Nations peacekeeping field missions provide the best advice to field missions on child protection and coordination with the host Government and other key stakeholders. These posts should be increased in peacekeeping missions according to the situation. Peace operations must be adequately resourced, so that they can continue to provide protection, coordination, and support to the children in armed conflicts.

Fiji reiterates its commitment to the protection of children in armed conflicts. Fiji is a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on peacekeeping and the prevention of the recruitment and the use of child soldiers.

Fiji has continuously deployed peacekeepers for more than 40 years, supporting the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security, and protecting children in armed conflicts. Fiji will continue to ensure that its peacekeepers bring the highest possible standards for protection of children, across all peace operations they are engaged in.

Annex XLI

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations

I would like to express gratitude to the Estonian presidency for convening today's high-level debate on this important issue and thank the distinguished speakers for their comprehensive update.

Armed conflicts impede children's effective enjoyment of their rights and strip them off the possibility to be protected from violence and abuse. We remain alarmed by the sustained high number of grave violations committed against children in armed conflict last year. Increased attacks on schools endangered them and infringed on their right to education. Moreover, children continue to be denied humanitarian access.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda and the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict by the General Assembly. Despite the significant progress that has been made with regards to the protection of children in armed conflicts during last decades, there is still more to be done in this end.

While we welcome the findings of the latest report of the Secretary-General and share its recommendations, we also express our serious concern over the continued mass violations against children that took place during the reporting period.

From the Georgia's perspective, effectively addressing grave violations against children is possible only through unwavering commitment to our obligations under international law and redoubling national and international efforts to achieve accountability for perpetrators of grave violations. Hence, Georgia continues to strengthen its adherence to the relevant international legal instruments. Our commitment to the protection of children has been further solidified by endorsing important multilateral initiatives, including the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic – this unprecedented global threat – particularly exacerbated the dire situation of children affected by armed conflicts. At the same time, the pandemic has further accentuated the importance of protecting hospitals and other civilian infrastructure.

As the conflict-affected children continue to suffer on a daily basis in different parts of the world, there is an urgent need of timely and unimpeded humanitarian access for providing assistance to them. Thus, we join the call of the Secretary-General upon all parties to allow safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access (P 284).

In this context I would like to draw the Council's attention to the dire humanitarian and human rights situation in the Russia-occupied regions of Georgia – Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia that has been aggravated amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Among our major concerns remain, inter alia, the restrictions of the freedom of movement, infringement of right to life and health and the prohibition of education in native language for children as well as other forms of discrimination they regularly face. These fundamental rights continue to be violated by the Russian Federation – the power exercises effective control on the ground, which has been clearly attested by the 21 January 2021 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights.

Due to the Russia's irresponsible and inhuman approach of closing the so-called "crossing points" along the occupation line, population residing in the occupied

regions, including children, remain stripped of the access to urgent care and medical evacuations that often leads to fatal cases.

The above-mentioned once again clearly demonstrates the urgent need of access for the international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms to both regions of Georgia. Herewith, we call on the international community to urge Russia to cease its provocative and destructive actions in the occupied regions of Georgia.

On its part, my country reiterates its readiness to contribute to the Secretary-General's endeavour to mobilize the international community's political will and commitment to prioritize the protection of children in conflict-affected areas, to advance peace efforts and leave no child behind.

Annex XLII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations

Germany thanks the Estonian presidency for convening this important debate on children and armed conflict at the highest level, which demonstrates the high importance Estonia attaches to the children and armed conflict agenda.

Today we are discussing a long awaited report. This report documents the shocking number of 26,425 grave violations committed against children in 2020. This number is all the more worrisome as we know that there are many more unreported violations hidden behind official numbers. And behind each single number is the fate of an individual child. The Security Council cannot allow these horrendous violations to continue. It cannot allow that in certain regions of the world, a whole generation of children grows up without knowing peace and without access to basic services and education. The severity of the situation has been made abundantly clear by the briefers here today.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandate is a moment for reflection. We want to sincerely thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and all those involved in the monitoring and reporting mechanism for their important work – especially the country task forces, who often risk their lives collecting and verifying data, a crucial task that has been made even more difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time we need to do everything we can in order to finally end these grave violations against children. Especially the reported attacks on education facilities and hospitals remain very concerning. We therefore encourage all those who have not yet done so to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration as well as the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Following-up on the Safe Schools Declaration is also an integral part of the call for Action to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action, which has been developed by France and Germany. We call on those who have not yet joined this Call to do so.

Just like the Secretary-General and many of the briefers today, we are also concerned about other violations, including sexual and gender-based violence in conflict – some even conducted by state actors, as reported in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sexual and reproductive health services must be provided to survivors, and perpetrators must be held accountable.

Killing and maiming as well as recruitment and use by armed group sadly remain the most common violations. We are equally concerned over attacks on water and sanitation services, and the subsequent impact on children – children are more likely to die from diseases linked to unsafe water than adults. Germany has particularly focused on the gender-related impact of poor or non-existent water, sanitation and hygiene services for children in conflict areas. For instance, we organized an event with UNICEF during Protection of Civilians Week in May that focused on children, especially girls, as the most vulnerable victims when water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities are attacked and water supply is cut off.

Against this background, Germany would like to use the opportunity of this open debate to highlight four crucial points for our future action.

First, we need to further mainstream the children and armed conflict Agenda in the Security Council's work. To this end, it is more important than ever that the Working Group continues to closely monitor the situation of children in conflict areas

which are on the agenda of the Security Council. As Chair, Belgium did an excellent job over the past two years; now Norway continues to ably lead the way. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and all others actors involved increasing the frequency of country reports submitted to the Group and, as a result, the significant reduction of the respective reporting periods. We also encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to brief other Security Council Working Groups and Sanctions Committees. We welcome new interactive dialogues with peace operations and UNICEF that also aim to integrate the Protection of Civilians, the Women, Peace and Security, and the Youth, Peace and Security Agendas. In this regard, Germany is organizing a high-level conference on the integration of human rights components into peace operations on 6 July.

Second, we have to ensure adequate age and gender-responsive child protection capacities and resourcing. The protection of children through humanitarian assistance and development programmes requires sufficient financial resources. As the COVID-19 pandemic implies additional challenges and needs, we are increasingly concerned about the often insufficient and untimely delivery of humanitarian assistance. Germany is determined to act. That is why we have committed 450 million euros for COVID-19-related humanitarian funding in 2020. In 2021 we have already committed an additional 115 Mio. EUR this far. Additionally, we are the second largest donor to UNICEF with over 600 Mio. EUR in 2020.

It is the responsibility of Member States, especially Security Council Members, to ensure that peace operations have a strong child protection mandate. It is the responsibility of all members of the General Assembly to ensure that peace operations are adequately resourced. The distinct role of child protection advisers must be preserved and strengthened. Germany will continue to push for a sufficient level of financing for child protection capacities. Child protection must also be part of pre-deployment training for all peacekeepers.

In the long-term, more sustainable funding is also needed for gender-sensitive reintegration programming for children affected by armed conflict. We call on all Member States to adhere to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

We see the 12,643 children that have been reportedly released from armed groups and armed forces in 2020 as a sign of hope and are encouraged by ongoing efforts of the Office of Special Representative of the Secretary-General and country task-forces with parties to conflict in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic to free further children.

It is crucial to ensure that children are not deprived of their freedom solely because of their alleged or actual association with armed groups. Germany has been supporting research by the international NGO Watchlist on children in detention and handover protocols that call for the swift transfer of children from security forces to civilian child protection actors for reintegration.

The third crucial aspect is accountability. Violators of international humanitarian law and human rights law need to be held accountable. In Syria, the Syrian regime and Russia have been bombing civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. In Somalia, we are yet to see any credible accountability for the killing and maiming and sexual violence committed against children. Access to humanitarian assistance is denied without consequences in Myanmar. With such rampant impunity, there is little deterrent against committing any of the horrible crimes against children detailed in the report. Germany reiterates its full confidence and support for the work of the International Criminal Court and international investigative mechanisms. The strengthening of national judicial systems is also crucial.

True justice further involves access to reparations and to gender- and age-sensitive comprehensive specialized services, including medical, mental and psycho-social health services, sexual and reproductive health services, and legal and livelihood support to survivors of grave violations. Special attention must be paid to children with disabilities.

Our fourth and final crucial point today concerns the Secretary-General annual report and the listings. We thank all who contributed to the Secretary-General substantial report. We believe it is timely that Cameroon and Burkina Faso have been added to the report this year. The cross-border nature of criminal groups, especially in the Sahel and Lake Chad area, provide for a worrying trend. The United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism, the annual report of the Secretary-General, and its annex are essential for accountability and preventing further violations against children. All perpetrators of grave violations against children must be held to the same standard, regardless of whether they are state forces or non-State armed groups. In Germany's view, it is therefore imperative that the findings of the report consistently reflect the listing in the Annexes. We note that the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen remains as "delisted" despite 194 documented violations of killing and maiming children in 2020. We would like to ask the Secretary-General to clarify his approach regarding the annex. We further wish to underline the importance of a more timely release of the reports in order to allow for more in-depth review and consultations with civil society.

In closing, Germany aligns itself with the statements submitted by the European Union and the Group of Friends.

Promoting children's rights is a key pillar of Germany's human rights policy.

Germany will remain committed to advancing the children and armed conflict Agenda in all its aspects.

Annex XLIII**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations**

Children and young people are among the most vulnerable members of society.

It is a common truth that children continue to be the invisible victims of human rights violations and abuses across the world. That is to say, killed or maimed, recruited or used as soldiers, sexually abused or violated, abducted, deprived of education and health services due to military attacks against schools or hospitals, and restrained from humanitarian access.

Added to that, the current global health crisis, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbates already existing vulnerabilities. It has a cumulatively negative impact on all dimensions of human security, especially for children.

Greece entirely agrees with Secretary-General Guterres, saying that “the pandemic also poses a significant threat to the maintenance of international peace and security”, thus calling for ceasefires as a means to facilitate response to COVID-19.

This cruel and devastating reality illustrates the urgent need to accelerate coordinated international action to achieve peace and sustainable human development for all. Especially for children, as future key actors in building peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies founded on the rule of law, justice and strong institutions.

Greece, prioritizing the protection of children affected by armed conflict and the safeguarding of their rights, ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which is essential for their adequate protection.

Greece has also endorsed the Paris Principles and Guidelines, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

Additionally, Greece has started implementation of its recently endorsed national action plan on the Rights of the Child, while being in the process of developing a national action plan on Women, Peace and Security, which highlights the protection of girls from conflict-related violations and abuses.

In this vein, Greece remains committed to joining forces with all international stakeholders in a global effort to adequately promote and protect the rights and welfare of conflict-affected children and contribute to building a peaceful, inclusive and gender-equal world.

Annex XLIV

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations

- Allow me to congratulate the republic of Estonia for organizing this high level open debate. Our acknowledgment is also extended to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as, Forest Whitaker and Laban Onisimus, for their valuable briefings.
- The findings of the annual report of the Secretary-General considers issues related to the implementation of this agenda while taking into account the mid- and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the protection of children in armed conflict. It is undeniable that the pandemic severely affected the ability of the United Nations to monitor and verify grave violations against children and curtailed its efforts to engage with parties to armed conflict to end and prevent such violations.
- Despite the available data, it is not yet possible to draw definitive conclusions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children. The verification of reported cases will take time before the full magnitude of violations against children becomes evident.
- Having statistical data is important because it is a way to realistically tailor response capacity on the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children, including the right to education and the vulnerability faced by girls.
- Due to school closures and loss of family income, there has been an increase in the vulnerability of children to recruitment and abuse. Girls have become more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence has increased because of reduced mobility and increased isolation.
- The right of children to protection from violence is enshrined in the convention on the rights of the child and yet still one billion children experienced some form of emotional, physical or sexual violence, only in the past year. We encourage States that have not yet done so, to consider ratifying the optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- Children are disproportionately affected by hostilities, both directly as victims and through their association with armed forces and armed groups. States should develop better comprehensive prevention policies to reduce demand for and access to weapons to decrease environmental factors that also contribute to violence against children, especially during armed conflicts.
- Guatemala stresses its commitment for ensuring and protecting the rights of every child. An example of this, is our endorsement of the safe schools declaration that calls for strong political support for the protection of every child comprehensively.
- Facilitating adequate funding for child protection capacities in united nations missions is of paramount importance. We call on the security council to continue to incorporate the key role played by child protection provisions and capacity in all relevant mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions.
- Greater efforts are needed to provide assistance to parties in armed conflict in order to fulfil the measures put in place to improve the protection of children with a view of developing action plans. The united nations plays a relevant role

for the facilitation and engagement with non-State actors to prevent grave violations.

- We encourage to follow up on this debate focusing on the actions and solutions involved in addressing this matter now that we are in the post-pandemic phase, in order to contribute to Member States still struggling with the effects of the virus.
- I conclude by underlining that the defence of children is a moral and political imperative. We must continue to act collectively in order to work towards the fulfilment of our responsibility to protect the most precious good of our societies: the children.

Annex XLV

Statement by the Chargé d'affaires of Indonesia to the United Nations, Mohammad Kurniadi Koba

I would like to thank the President for her leadership in today's open debate.

I also thank the Secretary-General and other briefers for their updates on this issue.

Every child deserves to live in a safe environment, which warrants policies that protect them from harm. This reasoning is the basis for Indonesia's policy on child protection and sets the tone for our stance in condemning six grave violations against children in armed conflict.

The high number of grave violations in 2020 is unsettling, notably the record high number of casualties as a result of recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, as well as the denial of humanitarian access.

It is, moreover, an unfortunate fact that the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated existing vulnerabilities of children, including by hampering their access to health-care, education and safe spaces. The socioeconomic impact of this pandemic also augmented violations against children.

On that note, allow me to elaborate three pertinent points.

First, no more children should be affected by armed conflict.

Children have rights to be protected from violence wherever they live. In this respect, we believe that the best approach until now is to find tailor-made and context-based solutions that end and prevent violations against children.

The most recent resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#) with previous resolutions provide a comprehensive basis on this matter.

We also need to consistently maintain our support towards the enhanced engagement by all parties to conflict on child protection. As clearly reported, this engagement resulted in the release of more than 12,000 children from armed groups.

Second, the children and armed conflict agenda is even more critical during this COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the pandemic is not over yet.

We need to ensure that our efforts towards this pandemic take the rights and needs of children into account. This covers their access to healthcare, quality education and delivery of timely COVID-19 response.

Through our peacekeepers on the ground, Indonesia maintains its concrete contribution on child protection. Our peacekeepers continue to engage communities within Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC) activities, including by supporting children to understand how to address the pandemic in various conflict situations.

Intricately linked and having a direct bearing on child protection, we remain our support to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third, invest more in the efforts to reintegrate children associated by armed groups.

As member of the Friends of Reintegration, Indonesia believes that the protection of children's rights must start from the 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.

Mental health and psychosocial support that involve local community are essential towards their effective reintegration into the society.

We commend UNICEF, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, relevant non-governmental organizations and personnel on the ground for their significant contribution to facilitate the transition of former child soldiers to normal life.

The best interests of children must be given primary consideration in all actions, with no exception. It is even more urgent for those children who are in conflict-affected areas and under the disruption of COVID-19 pandemic.

Let's put our words into action for the best interests of our children. Children are neither soldiers nor victims. They are our future.

Annex XLVI

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Protection of children, particularly girls, in armed conflicts is a fundamental moral and humanitarian principle and every effort must be made to ensure that it is fully respected by all parties in all conflicts.

Nevertheless, it is highly alarming that according to annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, “In 2020, the situation of children in armed conflict was marked by a sustained high number of grave violations.” Unfortunately, many of such violations have occurred in our neighbourhood from Afghanistan to Yemen to Palestine.

The most recent example of such violations in Afghanistan is a cowardly terrorist attack that took place, on 8 May 2021, in front of the Sayed Al-Shuhada school in the community of Shi’ites of the Hazara minority in Kabul, killing 85 and injuring 147 others, mostly schoolgirls.

This and other deadly terrorist acts in Afghanistan, mostly committed by Daesh, targeting certain religious and ethnic minorities as well as women and girls, underscore the continued need for combating terrorism as well as brining the perpetrators of these reprehensible acts to justice.

In Yemen, in 2020 the United Nations verified the killing and maiming of 194 by the so-called Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, as stated by the Secretary-General in his annual report. Nonetheless, on 22 June 2021, Yemeni children marched across the country stating that in more than six years, as a result of the attacks by that Coalition, over 3,500 Yemeni children were martyred, more than 4,000 were injured, thousands were orphaned, and millions were displaced from their homes. They also expressed their strong dissatisfaction with the United Nations for not properly reflecting in its reports of such grave violations of the rights of Yemeni children.

Yet, the most systematic and gross violation of the rights of child in the Middle East continues to be committed by the Israeli regime. According to the annual report of the Secretary-General, in 2020, the United Nations verified 1,031 cases of grave violations against 340 Palestinian children, including killing 11, maiming 324 and detaining 361, as well as 30 attacks on schools and hospitals by Israeli forces.

Only in its 11-day brutal and all-out war on Gaza in May 2021, Israeli forces killed 253 Palestinians, including 66 children. This includes 13 members of an extended family who have been killed and buried in the rubble of their own home – many of whom were children, one as young as six months. Israeli forces also destroyed 30 health facilities and around 50 schools.

These barbaric acts are clear manifestations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, materially breach fundamental norms and principles of international law, and entail international responsibility of the Israeli regime, whose officials must therefore be brought to justice for committing such heinous crimes.

Protection of children in armed conflicts primarily requires putting an end to the current conflicts and preventing their re-emergence and the eruption of new conflicts as well as ensuring the full and effective implementation of international humanitarian law by the conflicting parties.

The mechanism to list the parties violating the rights of children in armed conflicts must also be used effectively and without discrimination and selectivity. It

is a source of grave concern that the Israeli forces have never been blacklisted as violators of children's rights in relevant reports of the Secretary-General and also the name of the so-called Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen has been deleted from the top of that list.

We share the views of several Council members as well as significant number of other Member States that have expressed concern in recent years on discrepancies between the violations described in the reports of the Secretary-General and the listing of the parties in their annexes, as well as the premature de-listing of parties, calling for a consistent application of the criteria for listing and de-listing parties, and stressing the importance of upholding the impartiality and integrity of such mechanism.

Moreover, one of the missing elements of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict seems to be the absence of assessment about the adverse impacts of unilateral sanctions on the protection of children in conflict situations, where sanctions most often deteriorate the economy, exacerbate the living conditions and ultimately render the children vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist groups, force them to leave their family and home and join displaced communities, and deprive them of proper education, health services and the like. This important factor deserves serious attention by the Secretary-General in his future reports.

Finally, protection of children in armed conflicts is the protection of our future societies. This is a noble humanitarian duty and we must take it seriously and do whatever in our power to protect them from the scourge of wars and conflicts.

Annex XLVII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations

Italy aligns itself with the statement submitted by the European Union – as well as with the statement presented by 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 would like to thank Estonia for organizing this open debate, immediately after the release of the annual report of the Secretary-General, and to express our appreciation for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in that regard.

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the promotion and protection of children's fundamental rights, aggravating their existing vulnerabilities, hindering or preventing access to education, health and social services, and limiting safe spaces for the protection of minors, including the monitoring activities carried out within the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Violations of children's rights in armed conflict have dramatically risen, as this year's report shows, while school closures have had, and continue to have, a detrimental effect on millions of children worldwide, exposing children to violations that often have a long-lasting impact on their physical and psychological development, and undermine their ability to actively shape their future.

Within this wider framework, girl children affected by armed conflicts are particularly at risk of experiencing harsh and brutal forms of violence, also as a result of school drop-outs which often increase the risk of child, early and forced marriage, adolescent pregnancies, sexual exploitation and abuse, and recruitment into armed groups. Applying a gender lens when approaching the situation of children in armed conflicts is therefore necessary.

Italy welcomes the many initiatives taken to fight violence against women and girls in armed conflicts, including Security Council initiatives, as well as the inclusion of these crimes in the Statute of the International Criminal Court among war crimes and crimes against humanity.

During the last session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we hosted a high-level side-event on the accountability for violence against girl children in armed conflicts, together with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Save the Children, and a cross-regional group of Countries.

In line with Italy's strong support to Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on Women, Peace and Security, we dedicate specific attention to children, particularly girls, within the implementation of the fourth Italian national action plan on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in December 2020. References to girl children are mainstreamed throughout the Plan, along with a number of measures specifically dedicated to girls and girl children, to be implemented by different national administrations.

Moreover, Italy considers continued access to education, also during armed conflict, as an essential component of women's empowerment and their full participation in all spheres of society, in line with the spirit of article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We believe that much more needs to be done, both to prevent violence against girl children and to ensure accountability for occurred violations. In this regard, the international criminal justice system, starting from the International Criminal Court,

can play a pivotal role. Access to justice should be ensured to all girls victims of violence, as it constitutes a key tool to tackle impunity, to prevent other violations, and to help the victims overcome the damages caused by violence.

We encourage all States affected by armed conflict to take, develop and implement the necessary measures to ensure that the recruitment of children by government forces and non-State armed groups, as well as acts of violence against girls, are criminalized, and the perpetrators are brought to justice, in accordance with the relevant international provisions.

We strongly support mainstreaming the children and armed conflict in the work of the Security Council, including in mandate renewals: it is essential that the United Nations peace operations include child protection officers. Italy is engaged in providing its military personnel with the necessary skills to effectively protect children and encourages all TCC to do so.

We reiterate the importance of the independence, impartiality, and credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, the findings of which should always be accurately reflected in the annexes of the report, and that of the criteria and procedures for listing and de-listing parties to armed conflict deemed responsible for grave violations.

Italy will continue to engage in the protection of children's rights and in the implementation of the children and armed conflict Agenda, while fully supporting the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Annex XLVIII

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

I would like to begin by thanking Estonia for convening this important meeting. I thank the also Secretary-General and his Special Representative for the report on children and armed conflict.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Japan highly values the efforts and achievements made to date in protecting children affected by armed conflict, particularly by the United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions as well as UNICEF and other agencies on the ground. It is regrettable, however, that children in armed conflict continue to experience grave and large scale violations of their most basic rights. In conflict affected areas, girls are facing particular risks of abduction and sexual violence. Japan urges all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law and implement all Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated children's vulnerability to violence and abuses in conflict settings. Child protection responses must not be ceased or hampered. Safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to children in need is a matter of high priority, as recognized in Resolutions 2532 and 2565. The Council must use its influence to the fullest extent to implement an immediate global ceasefire and facilitate the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#) on healthcare in armed conflict.

Japan is committed to protecting children affected by conflict. In February, Japan committed a \$6.6 million contribution to the United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, to urgently protect the people affected by the situation in Tigray region, Ethiopia. Through this assistance, 624,000 children and 267,000 pregnant and lactating women will receive nutritional support. This assistance will also enable essential healthcare facilities to be repaired and 50,000 internally displaced persons and children to receive medical support including mental healthcare. In addition, in December, Japan decided to extend \$3.3 million assistance for refugees in Sudan who had entered from the Tigray region.

Japan is also committed to safeguarding children's right to education and echoes the urgent need to protect schools from attacks and to ensure access to safe and quality education. No child should be left behind. In February, Japan contributed about \$4 million to UNICEF to provide quality learning for 135,000 children in Yemen, where their access to education continues to be jeopardized due to prolonged conflict. This contribution will also support 3,000 teachers in delivering quality education. Japan also decided in February to contribute \$9 million to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in building or rehabilitating 6 elementary and middle schools in Gaza to provide more classrooms and better education facilities, including mental healthcare, to match increasing student enrolment.

Child protection is critical under conflict situations. At the same time, from a human security perspective, Japan deems it equally important to empower children by providing every child equal opportunity to fully develop their human potential. To serve longer-term peacebuilding objectives, we should spare no effort to improve learning environments and ensure access to safe and quality education. Japan will continue to work closely with other Member States, the United Nations system, international humanitarian organizations and civil society organizations in this endeavour.

Annex XLIX

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, Magzhan Ilyassov

At the outset, Kazakhstan expresses deep concern over the number of unconscionable acts of violence against children in armed conflict, further aggravated by the pandemic COVID-19, and its concomitant upheavals, turmoil, disruption and economic downturns. Child protection, is thus an absolute critical priority for the international community and must be mainstreamed in the work of the United Nations system and its six organs, peacekeeping and political missions, as well as state national institutions and organizations with enhanced capacity on this issue at all levels.

Thus, Kazakhstan presents the following recommendations for consideration to strengthen measures to safeguard children:

It is vital that all Member States ratify and strictly implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant treaties. Governments must endorse the international tools related to the protection of children in armed conflicts, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. The attacks on schools, as well as hospitals, and their use for military purposes must be prevented through immediate and resolute action by building a sustained system that protects all children.

We join the call made by UNICEF, and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and other agencies, to release children detained in relation to armed conflict. These also include children living with parents in detention due to their extreme vulnerabilities, especially the risks on their fragile lives from the spread of COVID-19, other viruses and infections in substandard settings.

It is equally important to have an effective system of strict law enforcement and judicial procedures, with high punishment for violence inflicted on children and ban on all impunity.

We need to set up mechanisms of early warning, monitoring and use of digital and communication technology for greater vigilance, monitoring and control of such crimes. These have to be followed with exchanges of experts and training of personnel and institutions for child protection.

It also means we must prioritize preventive measures and increase support for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children affected by armed conflicts, with guarantees for long term predictable funding by national and international donors.

It is essential to work with international and regional organizations, civil society in implementing the above measures.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic ([S/2021/398](#)).

In this context allow me to inform the Council about the steps taken by my country over the past two years to bring back from Syria and Iraq 725 of our citizens (37 men, 188 women), including over 500 children, 33 of which are orphans, who were lured into ISIL under false pretense and then entrapped in prolonged armed conflict. Our experience can provide best practices and lessons learned for other countries also engaged in similar repatriation operations.

It has been a complex and delicate endeavour over many stages. Each group of returnees are placed in specialized, protected adaptation facilities where they were given special medical, psychological examination. Psychologists, teachers, medical and social workers work with them for a month, identifying the most acute problems of each person.

Upon completion of the adaptation period, women with children travel to the regions of their origin, usually to the families of relatives.

We are well aware of importance of developing an integrated approach to this problem that will take years and thus implementing the rehabilitation, reintegration and resocialization (3R's) program for victims of terrorism in Kazakhstan.

Further rehabilitation is carried out by local government bodies with the participation of local non-governmental organizations, as well as assistance of our international partners. Currently, a total of 17 Rehabilitation Centres have been opened throughout the country to help returnees, and they are run by local non-governmental organizations supported by the Government.

It is important to emphasize that we consider returned women and children as victims of terrorism. At the same time, we strive to implement the most balanced approach that allows us to avoid both victimization and glorification of this category of people.

Special attention was given to the rights of a child. Mothers and their children are not separated at any stage of the program.

The returned orphans in most cases are adopted by their closest relatives – grandmothers, aunts, but there are those who find a new family, while brothers and sisters are not separated. There are cases when one family immediately took three returned orphans.

To avoid stigmatization all children born in war zones are documented with birth certificates indicating home cities of their parents as their birth places. This is important for the adaptation of children in the society, in the schools they attend.

Kazakhstan is ready to share its experience of reintegration as well as to learn from others. With the escalating conflicts and tensions around the world, it is vital to ensure that children grow up in a world free from fear, violence and hopelessness. It is, therefore, our moral responsibility to save precious young promising lives, who can be transformed into worthy citizens and beacons of light for others.

It is with great honour that the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan has accepted the invitation to serve on the Working Platform of Member States to review the draft of the study of the mandate of the children and armed conflict on its twenty-fifth anniversary. Alim Shaumenov, Director of Akniet Adaptation Centre, has been appointed as the designated focal point for Kazakhstan.

I am grateful for this opportunity to share my country's experience and let me reiterate Kazakhstan's commitment to contribute to our collective endeavours to achieve a safer world.

We believe that Kazakhstan's experience of repatriation, rehabilitation and resocialization may become a role model for rest of the world community. Our stance is clear – no citizen is left behind, justice and fair play for one and all.

Annex L

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

Allow me first to congratulate the President of the Republic of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid, on chairing this timely open debate and to congratulate Estonia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June.

We thank the President for organizing this important high-level open debate on children and armed conflict and we thank the speakers for their thorough briefing, as well as for their leadership in their respective field.

This open debate is very timely; it comes only a month after the bombing of the occupied Palestinian territories where at least 67 Palestinian children under 18 years old were killed in Gaza.

As Secretary-General António Guterres describes perfectly in one sentence: “If there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza”.

As we celebrate this year the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the *New York Times* on its front page of 26 May 2021 reminded the world that those 67 victims that were killed in Gaza: “They were just children”.

One of those children, a 12-year-old Palestinian girl called Nadine Abdullatif, reminded us too, while weeping and pointing at the rubble asking: “What am I supposed to do? Fix it? I’m only 10. I can’t even deal with this anymore. I just want to be a doctor or anything to help my people. But I can’t. I’m just a kid”.

When we talk about children who died, we think about children who did not, children who woke up without their parents, without a father, without a mother, without a sibling, without a classmate, without a friend; children who woke up with one of their body parts missing, children who cannot sleep at night from the trauma of the bombing and the loss.

Unfortunately, the year 2020 has been particularly somber for children. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, stated, “The wars of adults have taken away the childhood of millions of boys and girls again in 2020.”

As we read the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, published last week, we are struck by the number of violations against children in 2020 verified by the United Nations: “26,425 grave violations”.

It is important to highlight that this striking number refers to violations being verified by the United Nations, without representing the full scale of violations against children.

As stated in the aforementioned report, attacks on schools increased, verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children increased alarmingly by 90 and 70 per cent, respectively. The Secretary-General noted that these grave violations do not affect boys and girls the same way; whereas 85 per cent of children recruited and used were boys, 98 per cent of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls.

These alarmingly high numbers reveal how violations against children soared, in the context of conflicts and how, despite the repeated calls by the Secretary-General to silence the guns, many conflicts have intensified, and others have erupted. COVID-19 pandemic added fuel to the fire by aggravating existing vulnerabilities for children,

hindering their access to education, health, and social services, and exposing them to recruitment, abduction, and sexual violation.

Impunity is not an option anymore. Perpetrators cannot get away with killing, maiming, raping, abducting, and recruiting children anymore. All perpetrators of all violations against children must be brought to justice and held accountable without any delay. We recall Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#) and we stress on the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict.

We need to give our children a better future, a better world to live and prosper in.

We need to act now, and we need to build a post-pandemic world where our children do not have to hide from the terrifying noises of sirens, from raids and shelling, where they do not have to run from bombings, and where they do not have to live in constant fear.

Our children deserve better. They deserve to dream.

Let us all help them to fulfil their dreams.

Annex LI

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations, Georg Sparber

25 years ago, the General Assembly created the children and armed conflict agenda – as a response to the many devastating effects of war on children. While the children and armed conflict mandate has had a positive impact on the livelihoods of many children since, the current situation sadly illustrates its continued urgent relevance. The number of grave violations against children remained high in 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic has increased their vulnerabilities. We reiterate that the protection of the mandate's independence and integrity is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility. This also includes the objective, consistent and transparent practice of listing parties that have committed grave violations against children and those that have and have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children.

Liechtenstein remains deeply concerned about the high occurrence of sexual and gender based violence against children. Such violence is often underreported owing to 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. In times of quarantines, lockdowns and other restrictions on movement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is particularly important to ensure access to reporting mechanisms and to safe, timely, quality, age-appropriate, survivor-centred medical care and mental health and psychosocial support services for all survivors. We reiterate our strong support for the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Representative to shed light on victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, including men and boys, in line with Security Council resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#).

We furthermore continue to be alarmed about the attacks against schools and other education institutions. Such attacks violate the right to education and often constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. Depriving children of access to education and thus violating the right to education also has a devastating impact on sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated inequalities and limited access to education. The Safe Schools Declaration remains an important tool and its effective implementation is key.

The international justice system has played a key role in ending impunity for grave violations against children. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has been exemplary in its child-sensitive approach. It requires the Chief Prosecutor to appoint advisers with legal expertise on violence against children and the International Criminal Court to take measures to protect the safety, physical and psychological well-being, dignity and privacy of victims and witnesses, and to have regard to age in this respect.

Engaged in the prosecution of crimes committed against children from its inception, the International Criminal Court has been vital in determining how to handle cases involving child soldiers, including complex cases with children involved both as perpetrator and victim. The case of Dominic Ongwen is a prime example: Found guilty for a total of 61 crimes comprising crimes against humanity and war crimes, he himself was kidnapped and forced into military service at a young age. The International Criminal Court's conviction of Bosco Ntaganda for the forced enlistment of boys and girls in armed groups, and the perpetration of sexual violence against them, is an important step forward in ensuring justice for children in conflict. It is also a milestone decision in recognizing sexual and gender based violence against

both male and female child soldiers equally. The Trust Fund for Victims of the International Criminal Court has provided important assistance to children and it is in the process of designing measures providing collective reparations with individualized components for the victims and survivors of the Ntaganda case. Liechtenstein has been a donor and supporter of the Trust Fund for many years.

The situation in Syria continues to be of grave concern to us. The conflict has entered its eleventh year, with grave impacts on children. Millions have suffered death, injury, displacement, destruction, poverty, hunger and insecurity. An estimated 11.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 4.8 million are children. We call on the Security Council to ensure safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to all Syrians in need. We furthermore support the Secretary-General's Special Representative in her call to parties to the conflict to remove all impediments to humanitarian access to children and to enable unimpeded access to education. And we welcome her continued engagement and cooperation with special mechanisms, including the General Assembly accountability mechanism (IIIM).

Annex LII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, Rytis Paulauskas

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement submitted by the European Union and would like to additionally submit a statement on its national capacity.

Lithuania would like to sincerely thank the Estonian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this very important debate. We also really appreciate the briefers for their presentations.

As Nelson Mandela rightly said, there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. In this context, the recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict reveals a very grim reality. The numbers are staggering: 26,425 grave violations affecting 19,379 children were recorded over the reporting period. It makes 42 pages filled with numbers and figures. Although properly structured and disaggregated, these numbers do not reflect the scope of real suffering. Behind each and every number, each and every figure, there are personal stories of real children, real families, real communities. The stories of real loss and real trauma. In the 21st century that has seen the real breakthrough in many fields – from utilization of new frontier technology solutions, including use of AI, to new space programmes – it is tragically sad and heart-breaking to read stories of children who will never be able to fully enjoy their childhood.

As the current President of the UNICEF's Executive Board, I had an opportunity to get the broader insight into many problems that children still face in the modern world. The impacts of armed conflict and violence are particularly devastating for children, with interruptions to education and health services and heightened risk of conflict-related sexual violence. Children continue to suffer daily, and the numbers of children killed in conflict are appalling.

Children, who survived, will live with the terrible remnants of the conflict. The gravity of the violations is so much heavier and so longer-lasting than might appear from the sheer numbers: the impact of the conflict may adversely affect the life trajectory of children far more than adults and may leave enduring impacts in posttraumatic stress disorder. Severe losses and disruptions during the conflict lead to long-term psychological consequences, high rates of depression and anxiety.

During the reporting period, the scale and severity of grave violations against children remained very concerning, including increased number child abductions, recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict. In particular, Lithuania is appalled with the fact that during the verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children increased alarmingly by 90 and 70 per cent, respectively. This is utterly disturbing, especially having in mind that sexual violence cases are usually greatly underreported and that they disproportionately affect girls.

Lithuania urges all parties of armed conflicts, state and non-State alike, to end all violations against children and fully implement international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. As set in the report, the levels of denial of humanitarian access to children continued to be high, therefore Lithuania urges all parties of armed conflicts to provide safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access. All parties that fail to comply with these obligations that bear on the protection of children in conflict must be held accountable.

The period of reporting was as difficult as never before – the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on every aspect of our lives and children in conflicts despite already being one of the most vulnerable groups, had to additionally

face pandemic-related consequences, such as school closures, increased number of all forms of gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage.

The pandemic has, however, provided forward-looking solutions aimed at equipping all children with digital learning opportunities. We believe that the alternative and distance learning programmes that have been put in place while schools have been closed during COVID-19, should be made available to children in armed conflict, especially girls and children with disabilities, and should continue to be available even when the pandemic ends.

It is also of utmost importance to ensure that all of those children (and their families) that were subjected to grave violations, especially survivors of rape and sexual violence, would receive the needed assistance and help, including psychological support, medical and legal assistance, food and shelter. In this context, we need to ensure that proper long-term and comprehensive programmes for rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict would be put in place.

Lithuania would like to reiterate our strong support to the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. As this year we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of this mandate, we would like to thank Virginia Gamba and her whole team for their uncontested work in the field. Lithuania would also like to extend our appreciation to UNICEF and the Executive Director H. Fore for the tireless efforts of protecting the children.

This report should be a wake-up call. A reminder that behind each and every number in the report, there is a real boy or girl asking not to be left behind and not to be forgotten. Very often children are not able to protect themselves. The responsibility of protecting their peace, their dreams and their tomorrow lies on our shoulders. Let us not fail them.

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

[Original: French]

Luxembourg thanks the Estonian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, as well as all the briefers who enriched the debate with their experience and expertise.

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

When the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict was created 25 years ago, our common goal was to end violations against children in conflict situations. We have made remarkable progress in many areas, including the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict, which has enabled us to record the most serious violations. Without that mechanism, we would not be able to understand the extent of the phenomenon, nor would we be able to take action to put an end to it. Moreover, the action plans that Governments are implementing with the United Nations have made it possible to demobilize thousands of children. They remain an essential tool to guide governments' efforts to comply with international humanitarian law.

However, the latest annual report of the Secretary-General gives a disturbing assessment of the situation. Approximately 24,000 serious violations have been recorded for 2020, and we know from experience that the actual figures are most likely higher. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has hampered monitoring and reporting of violations, and has increased the vulnerability of children. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic on children is likely to be felt in the long term and may reverse the gains made. In some countries, the closure of schools due to the health situation has increased the number of instances of occupation of schools for military purposes.

But the pandemic, as serious as it is, is only an aggravating factor. The real causes of violations against children are conflict and the inability or unwillingness of parties to conflict to take appropriate measures to protect children. This is why it is necessary to reiterate the primary responsibility of States to protect their population against abuse, to shed light on the violations committed, and to bring the guilty to justice.

International courts can on occasion play an important subsidiary role, as was the case recently with the conviction of Dominic Ongwen by the International Criminal Court.

The Security Council, through its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, must continue to assume its responsibility, notably by including child protection provisions in all relevant resolutions. All countries can nevertheless contribute to advancing the Children and Armed Conflict agenda through child protection initiatives. Those initiatives include the Safe Schools Declaration, drawn up by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, which Luxembourg particularly welcomes. Since its launch in 2015 by Norway and Argentina, the initiative has seen growing success.

In support of the fourth International Conference on Safe Schools to be held in October 2021 in Abuja, Nigeria, Luxembourg, in partnership with Norway, will

organise regional consultations on 2 July to identify common priorities and challenges in the Europe/Central Asia region.

You can count on Luxembourg to continue to support the mandate of the Special Representative, as well as the agenda on children and armed conflict.

Annex LIV

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations

I begin by thanking Estonia for organizing today's important debate on children and armed conflict and the briefers for sharing their valuable insights.

Malta aligns itself with the statements by the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and would like to highlight a few points in its national capacity.

Malta expresses its deep appreciation for the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba as we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate. This milestone is a time to reflect on our achievements and all that still needs to be done to address the plight of children affected by armed conflict. Violence and hostilities continue to have a devastating impact on children, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated their vulnerability.

Important work is being carried out by civil society and humanitarian actors. We thank them for their efforts and dedication to protect children, often at great personal risk.

Malta is concerned with the findings of the report. The number of grave violations presented in it are staggering. Even more worrying is that fact that such numbers may be underreported, given that the COVID-19 pandemic has also impeded information gathering and verification.

The countless reports detailing the recruitment and use of child soldiers; killing and maiming, as well as abductions, of children; the high number of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children; repeated attacks against schools and hospitals; and the continued denial of humanitarian assistance present a very worrying picture where children face both immediate dangers and long-term risks.

Children's right to education must be protected, at all times. This is also particularly important for girls as they are often the last ones to resume their education after schools' closure.

The protection of children must be central in our policy and decision-making processes. This goal is attainable, but we must act with urgency. United Nations peacekeeping operations have a key role to play in protecting children in armed conflict, as well as others within the United Nations system, including UNICEF.

State and non-State parties must immediately cease all violations against children by ensuring their behaviour is in full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. This approach will facilitate concrete and effective protection for children, all more important amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As a signatory to the Paris Principles and Commitments, Vancouver Principles, and the Safe Schools Declaration, which provide a strong framework for us to build on, Malta remains committed to playing its part in ensuring that children are afforded the protection they deserve.

We strongly encourage the Council and Member States to support the full implementation of strong child protection mandates, including through the speedy deployment of senior child protection advisers and teams, and by prioritizing the protection of children in peacekeeping transitions.

Should Malta be entrusted to serve on the Security Council in 2023–2024, children and armed conflict will be a matter of priority during its tenure. We firmly believe that this issue should be mainstreamed across the work of the Security Council.

Annex LV

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun

At the outset, I would like to thank the presidency of Estonia for convening today's Security Council high-level open debate on children and armed conflict. I also appreciate all the briefers for their insightful and valuable contributions to the meeting.

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. Children are the future leaders. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about one of the worst tragedies in humanity. Besides the loss of millions of lives, the pandemic exacerbated children's vulnerability to serious violations. Subsequently, its long-term negative impact will greatly continue to disturb our efforts to prevent grave violations against children in conflict situations.

Myanmar expresses its deep concern about a sustained number of 23,946 grave violations that affected 19,379 children in armed conflict in 21 situations worldwide as unveiled in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/437) covering the period of 2020. We are particularly alarmed by the trends of increased attacks on schools, continued denial of humanitarian access and the underreporting of sexual violence, of which 98 per cent was perpetrated against girls.

The protection of children needs to be ensured first and foremost by a legal framework that guarantees their rights and wellbeing. Conflict parties' compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law is essential. Efforts to monitor and verify grave violations against children must be strengthened at all levels especially at the national level. All perpetrators must be held accountable.

Despite the constitutional constraint with regard to the armed conflicts, the elected civilian Government, with its strong commitment, led by President U Win Myint and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi implemented a number of significant initiatives to enhance child protection capacity, inter alia, the enactment of a new Child Rights Law, the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973, and the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee for the prevention of the six grave violations during armed conflict. The Government fully cooperated with the United Nations entities including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Taking this opportunity, we wish to commend the Special Representative for her relentless efforts and hard work, and thank her for the continued support towards the people of Myanmar.

However, in 2020, 1,012 Myanmar children including 88 girls experienced 1,039 grave violations. I wish to express our profound sadness and sympathy for all affected children. As verified by the Secretary-General in his report, more than 80 per cent of these grave violations were perpetrated with impunity by the military known as the Tatmadaw.

Last year, we cautiously welcomed the delisting of Myanmar military from the violation of recruitment and use of children, one of the six grave violations against children, hoping that such a positive gesture might lead to the improvement of their behaviours. However, the military's recruitment and use of children in 2020 increased to 726 from 17 in 2019. They continued to commit grave violations of killing and maiming children and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children as reported by the Secretary-General.

Given the widely known brutality and inhumane acts of the military and its total disregard for human life, the military has been relisted under Section B of annex I of this annual report of the Secretary-General for the recruitment and use of children. The military continues to be listed in Section A as in previous years.

A safe and bright future for children can only be realized by a peaceful environment which can only be enabled by the rule of law, justice and respect for human rights. Since the illegal military coup on 1 February 2021, the military has destroyed our nascent democratic transition, and has ruined the rule of law. Justice has been out of reach. Violence and atrocity crimes have been committed by the military security forces on daily basis. The impact of the atrocities on the people in particular children by the military is deeply disturbing and heartbreaking. Nearly 900 people were ruthlessly murdered by the military. According to UNICEF, as of 21 June, at least 60 children have been killed since February, while countless others have been seriously injured. The military forces tortured and threatened healthcare professionals and teachers for their opposition to the military coup. We unequivocally condemn all kinds of attacks on schools and hospitals as a grave violation against children. The security forces continue to occupy many schools and hospitals throughout the country, making it impossible in enabling a safe environment for learning and health care.

In light of the rapidly deteriorating situation in my country, Myanmar, after the illegal military coup, I wish to appeal to the Security Council, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as well as to the Secretary-General and his Special Representative as follows:

1. Prevent further grave violations by the military forces of killing and maiming children and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in Myanmar.
2. Ensure that the military forces stop indiscriminate and excessive use of force and comply with the obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.
3. End impunity and hold the perpetrators of grave violations against children accountable.
4. Ensure that the country task force on monitoring and reporting receives sufficient support and strengthens its monitoring, reporting, prevention and response efforts regarding all violations and abuses against children in Myanmar.
5. Demand the military for unhindered humanitarian access to civilians including children displaced by armed clashes.
6. Call upon the United Nations and donors to work with the National Unity Government of Myanmar, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to provide short- and long-term humanitarian support to children especially in conflict affected areas and camps for internally displaced persons.
7. Demand that the military forces stop using schools and hospitals for military purposes so that a safe and secure environment for children's education and health can be ensured.

8. Demand the immediate end of military coup and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

In conclusion, children in Myanmar have suffered enough from prolonged conflicts. History tells us that the brutal military dictatorship only exacerbates the people's sufferings in various ways. The fundamental solution to building a peaceful future for our children is the emergence of a federal democratic union where human rights are fully respected, justice and the rule of law upheld, the military be professional through the establishment of a federal army. With this goal in mind, the National Unity Government together with the people of Myanmar will do everything we can to eradicate the military dictatorship and build a peaceful, democratic and federal union.

Annex LVI

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

I begin by extending my sincere appreciation to Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, for organizing this high-level open debate on the important issue of children and armed conflict.

I thank the President, the Secretary-General and the distinguished briefers for their remarks and valuable insights.

Nepal believes that protection of children is a crucial aspect of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

As a party to the Convention on Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, Nepal has enacted necessary legal instruments and established a legal and administrative framework for the promotion and protection of the rights of children. Nepal remains committed to all the normative framework of the Security Council relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict including resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#).

Nepal commends the role of the United Nations for setting rightful attention to the issues of children and armed conflict for several years. Numerous normative frameworks have been devised under the auspices of the United Nations for the compliance of obligation to parties of conflict on protection of children. The United Nations has supported many countries in demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of thousands of conflict-affected children; and responded to violations and abuses against children.

Despite our collective efforts, children have not ceased to suffer. Reports of Secretary-General, year after year, indicated that the high numbers of children are suffering from grave violations by parties in conflicts. Children continue to be recruited, abducted, raped, killed or maimed in conflict -affected areas. Schools and hospitals are being targeted, attacked or used for military purposes. Violations against children have been used as tactics of war.

Children are the most vulnerable section of the society during the conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation of thousands of already vulnerable children in conflict-ridden areas. Due to pandemic induced economic fragilities and closure of schools, children are at high risk to be abused, recruited and used by armed groups, suffer sexual exploitation and other forms of violence.

National Governments have the primary responsibility for protection and promotion of the rights of children. They must implement national policies ensuring inalienable rights of children with adequate measures for their education, health, safety, well-being and opportunities to develop their inherent qualities. Every nation must fulfil their obligations relating to rights and protection of children and take remedies thereof, if their rights are violated. State should be responsible in bringing perpetrators to justice in the case of the violation of rights.

Comprehensive and collaborative approach is required to address the issues of conflict-affected children. National Governments, international community, civil societies and all other relevant actors should work together during conflict as well as post conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies. Consideration of the views of children in post conflict rehabilitation and reintegration process is must for the sustained solution. At the same time, overall development policies with investment in education, health system, State and social support

mechanism to children are essential for sustained promotion and protection of rights of children.

Nepal's own experience of successful transition from conflict to peace includes reintegration of conflict-affected children, among others. The Government of Nepal had included child protection provisions from the early stages of peace process emphasizing on the best interest of children and their families. Successful implementation of time-bound and tailor-made action plans for rehabilitation and reintegration of children was a key element of peace process. Nepal was delisted from the report of the Secretary-General as we completed this process in a transparent manner.

As one of the largest troops and police contributing countries, Nepal provides its peacekeepers with adequate pre-deployment training on child protection issues in all its aspects including prevention and response to violation against children.

To conclude, I wish to emphasize on the necessity of our collective efforts for the protection of child rights while strengthening accountability framework as well as investigative and prosecutorial capacities of national Governments in case of violations during and post conflict setting.

Annex LVII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations

We thank the Permanent Mission of Estonia for holding this year's annual debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict.

We also thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other briefers for their insightful statements.

Millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but deliberate targets. While some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease.

The facts revealed in the Secretary-General's latest report ([S/2021/437](#)) are quite sombre.

The overall number of grave violations remained alarmingly high at 26,425. These 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.

The report further revealed that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated difficulties in the protection of children affected by armed conflicts, with humanitarian agencies finding it hard to conduct their work safely.

Whatever the causes of modern-day brutality towards children, the time has come to call a halt. These acts must end, and perpetrators must be held to account.

Despite some progress in recent years, the scale and intensity of today's conflicts is stretching our capacity to protect children.

In conflict zones and occupied territories, we are witnessing a deeply troubling breakdown in humanity and diminishing respect for human life and dignity.

Nowhere is this grim reality starker than in today's Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK).

In this regard, I wish to draw the Council's attention to the latest report of the Secretary-General which has expressed deep concerns on the "grave violations" against children in occupied Jammu and Kashmir by the Indian security forces.

The report also raises alarm on the continued illegal detention of (Kashmiri) children, torture in detention and detention without charge or due process.

In view of these serious concerns, the Secretary-General has rightly 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" in IOJK.

We are not surprised by the findings of the report of the Secretary-General.

Despite the persistent concerns raised by multiple Special Rapporteurs and Mandate Holders of the Human Rights Council and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the human rights and humanitarian situations continues to deteriorate for the innocent children of IOJK since 5 August 2019.

During the year 2020, we continued to witness some of the worst atrocities and state terrorism taking place in IIOJK:

- More than 300 innocent Kashmiris, including women and children, were killed in “fake encounters” and staged “cordon-and-search” operations.
- 750 Kashmiris were critically injured, while 2,770 innocent Kashmiris were arbitrarily detained, and 922 houses destroyed as part of collective punishment inflicted on the Kashmiri communities.

In a particularly horrifying incident, a gut-wrenching picture of a three-year-old Kashmiri boy sitting on the body of his grandfather (Muhammad Bashir) killed by the Indian forces went viral on the internet, drawing ire from social media and civil society. The three-year-old boy was shown sitting on top of his motionless grandfather as he cried.

Such inhuman actions are not only in violation of the Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict but are also in breach of the “best interests of the child” principle under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which India is a state party.

The worsening situation and increased attacks against children in IIOJK, as reported in the latest report of the Secretary-General, calls for Security Council’s intervention by holding India accountable for its grave breaches of international humanitarian law and war crimes in IIOJK.

Pakistan fully supports the mandate of the Special Representative, which is adequate to deal with situations of armed conflict. We want to strengthen the political consensus around it but the mandate does not need accretion.

We firmly believe that the legal parameters of the mandate established by the Security Council resolutions must be respected. Our singular focus should continue to remain on situation of “armed conflicts”. We hope that this principle would be kept in mind while preparing future reports.

Annex LVIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Panama to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

This year, against the background of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the agenda for children and armed conflict, the Government of the Republic of Panama, led by President Laurentino Cortizo Cohen, reiterates its commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of children and adolescents, as well as to adopting new actions aimed at strengthening those rights.

In September 2019, Panama submitted its first report for consideration by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified by Panama through Act No. 48 of 2000.

It is important to note that there is no civil war or international armed conflict in Panama, that article 310 of our Constitution provides that “the Republic of Panama shall have no army” and that, in accordance with the scope of the Protocol, the government bodies responsible for implementation of the Protocol include the Ministry of Security, with its various agencies, and the Ministry of Social Development, as the lead agency for policy on children and adolescents; the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family, as the specialized autonomous body responsible for the coordination of public policies for children and adolescents; the National Office of Refugee Affairs, as the body responsible for requests for refuge and care of refugees; the Public Prosecutor’s Office, as the body responsible for prosecuting offences; and the Ombudsman’s Office, as the country’s independent human rights institution responsible for ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and guarantees.

As a mechanism for the protection of rights, the organic laws of the security forces of the Republic of Panama stipulate the age of legal majority as a requirement for entry.

As a country committed to respecting human rights in matters of armed conflict, Panama has adhered to or ratified the following instruments:

- The Arms Trade Treaty, in February 2014;
- The Convention on Cluster Munitions, in November 2010;
- The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, in August 2004;
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in March 2002.
- The endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration, in 2015;
- The adoption of Act No. 57 of 27 May 2011, which regulates the possession, carrying, import and export of and trade in firearms, ammunition and related materials, as well as other related activities.

Since the adoption of the first resolution on children and armed conflict by the Security Council in 1999, Panama has ratified 16 Hague Conventions, related to the conduct of hostilities or means and methods of warfare, and nine Geneva Conventions pertaining to the general issue of ensuring full respect for the victims of armed conflict.

We have also incorporated into our laws the use and protection of the Red Cross emblem in accordance with the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, and by Act No. 50 of 2010 we ratified the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects of 1980, and incorporated into our national laws the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem, better known as the Red Crystal.

Our Criminal Code establishes measures to prevent and punish crimes against collective security and crimes against humanity, which constitute a mechanism to facilitate the State's compliance with its international obligations under international humanitarian law to identify and punish the activities of armed groups.

Panama guarantees access to international humanitarian protection for minors, and our laws do not allow minors to carry weapons or serve as part of the security forces.

Panama signed Decree No. 5 of 16 January 2018, which includes a chapter on the protection and care of children and adolescents seeking recognition of refugee status in Panama, thus ensuring the best interests of the child.

It is a guide, based on international standards, that is aimed at improving the refugee status procedure by strengthening inter-agency coordination of actions and responses for the protection of children and adolescents seeking refugee status, between the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family and the Office for the Care of Refugees, attached to the Ministry of the Interior. It is important to point out that, since there is no armed conflict in our country, we are able to be a host country for migrant children and adolescents coming from countries that are experiencing such conflict.

We have therefore decided to continue working in this joint intersectoral and inter-agency effort with the local government, the international community and non-governmental organizations to define strategies and programmes aimed at protecting and guaranteeing the rights of persons in need of international protection, including children and adolescents.

We understand the importance of the issue and reiterate our commitment, as a country of peace, dialogue and without armed conflict, to continue strengthening joint actions to ensure the comprehensive protection of Panamanian children, as well as children arriving in our territory who are escaping situations of conflict that limit and restrict the full exercise of their rights.

We are committed to continue working on the observations received in our first and most recent report submitted.

Annex LIX

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations, Enrique A. Manalo

We appreciate the presidency of Estonia in organizing this open debate as we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda this year. We also thank briefers for their informative presentations.

Children have the right to be children. Armed conflict deprives them of this right. In armed conflict, children are endangered by direct attacks, damage to essential infrastructure including schools, and recruitment into armed organizations. Disrupted access to education and health services have long-term consequences on the physical and mental well-being of children and hampers the development of entire communities.

The Philippines has experienced these challenges firsthand, notably during the siege of Marawi by ISIS elements in 2017 and in incidents with armed rebel groups since then. These devastating events have only strengthened our resolve and commitment to protect children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and various Security Council resolutions informed Republic Act 11188. Signed into law in 2019, the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law declares children as “zones of peace” and provides special protection against grave violations.

Furthermore, this act recognizes that child protection must be gender sensitive. Girls affected by armed conflict are more vulnerable to sexual violence and are often the first to drop out of school. To this end, the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law affirms girls’ rights to education and access to reproductive health services. Girls’ access to education is both a preventative measure and an essential component of post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration.

National laws and commitments must be paired with robust dissemination, implementation, and monitoring. COVID-19 has strained government resources and posed new logistical challenges. Despite this, the Philippine Government, together with civil society, continues to strengthen protection mechanisms for children affected by armed conflict by raising awareness for the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law. The Council for the Welfare of Children led an online caravan to disseminate the salient features of the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law to clusters in Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in August 2020. The caravan engaged a total of 430 national and regional frontline service providers from the Government, private sector, civil society organizations, and supported by child protection allies and child rights advocates. A series of online consultations at the national and regional levels were also conducted on the new handling protocol for children in situations of armed conflict, towards equipping responders with step-by-step procedures on how to efficiently respond to children in situations of armed conflict and grave child rights violations and concerns.

Similarly, the dissemination activities on the National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace were conducted virtually. This framework guides Department of Education (DepEd) offices at all levels, including schools in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from armed conflict incidents. While in December 2020, DepEd, in partnership with UNICEF Philippines, also published a report on building communities and schools as zones of peace which featured case studies of schools and communities in armed conflict situations in different parts of the country.

International cooperation can support national implementation and monitoring efforts. Recently, the Armed Forces of the Philippines signed a Strategic Plan with the United Nations resident coordinator and UNICEF representative to the Philippines. This aligns the Armed Forces' commitment to the protection of children with international humanitarian and human rights laws by ensuring all personnel are properly trained to respect children's rights. Under the Strategic Plan, the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting shall assist the Armed Forces of the Philippines in revising its policy guidelines towards strengthened protection of children in situations of armed conflict, and enhanced accountability for grave child rights violations.

The Secretary-General's country reports are also valuable. The reports are most effective when there is active communication with national agencies during the drafting process. Doing so allows national agencies to quickly address potential issues or clarify information.

Protecting children requires a whole-of-Government approach that centers children in conflict-prevention, during situations of armed conflict, and in peace processes. The Philippines remains committed to mobilizing all relevant agencies to achieve this. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed novel challenges in addressing the decades-old problem of children and armed conflict. But if the international community learns from innovative solutions and redoubles its efforts, we can make strides in protecting children and preventing conflict.

Annex LX**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Poland to the United Nations**

I thank the President and I thank all of today's briefers for their insightful and valuable presentations. Our particular thanks go to Special Representative Gamba. Her commitment and dedication to the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda demonstrate the ideals that stood behind the creation of this crucial mandate 25 years ago.

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to the delegation of Estonia for a successful presidency of the Security Council this month and for convening this significant and timely discussion on children and armed conflict.

Poland aligns itself with the statements delivered by the European Union and by the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. Both documents underscore the pressing need to reverse unsettling trends in child rights violations that, in the last year, had worsened even *further due to the COVID-19 outbreak*.

The figures for the number of children affected by armed conflict across the globe are truly shocking and appalling. Abductions, military recruitment, sexual violence or killing and maiming are just a few examples of the main forms of exploitation to which they are subjected. The annual report of the Secretary-General provides a devastating picture in this regard. In 2020, violations affected 19,379 children. This is outrageous – all the more so because, in reality, this number may be much higher due to unreported cases and the lack of access to verified information.

That being said, Poland is greatly disturbed about the scale and scope of grave violations committed against children in conflict-affected areas. Our particular concern is in the detrimental impact of COVID-19 increasing children's vulnerability to a wide range of child protection problems.

Confinement measures put in place in order to combat the pandemic often involve school closures which only further exacerbate the already challenging environment for schools to operate. Systematic deprivation of access to education make children more susceptible to recruitment and use by armed groups. In light of this, as a proud Member of the Steering Committee for the Global Coalition for Reintegration as well as a member of the Group of Friends of Reintegration, we urge to redouble efforts to develop reintegration programmes benefitting former child soldiers and other war-affected youth and children associated with parties to the conflict.

We are also troubled by the increase in violence levelled against critical infrastructure. Two months ago, in this chamber, we adopted Security Council resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#) on the very issue. Unfortunately, the number of attacks on hospitals and other medical facilities, schools, medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as their equipment and supplies keeps growing. In this context, we welcome and endorse initiatives that aim to reduce the impact of conflict on objects indispensable to the survival of civilian population, including children, such as the Safe Schools Declaration.

Children are among the most vulnerable members of society suffering disproportionately in situations of conflict. From this perspective, it is even hard to imagine that within this group there is also a number of those whose needs are even greater. These are children with disabilities. Often abused, rejected, abandoned, and too weak to cry for help. Let us spare no effort to create conditions that will enable them to return to normal lives and livelihoods. In view of this, protecting and

reintegrating vulnerable and fragile groups of child refugees, internally displaced, war traumatized, and children born of sexual violence have become top priorities of the Polish development cooperation.

Given the torturous consequences of armed conflict, Poland recognizes the importance to provide constant psychological support for children and youth. Here, I would like to underline that Polish Aid is involved in the development activities aimed at providing necessary support for children affected by the conflict in Ukraine. Together with the Polish Humanitarian Action, we have been improving the quality of social services through developing capacities of social and psychological support personnel in the settlements along the contact line.

When there is no accountability and no effective prosecution and punishment for perpetrators, there is abuse and injustice. In this respect, the monitoring and reporting mechanism has shown value in exposing grave violations committed against children. What we must do now is further support it altogether with strengthening national and international judiciary institutions, as well as enhancing child protection capacities scattered across the United Nations system, including in the delivery of peacekeeping mandates. Only this way we can ensure that parties to armed conflict fully comply with their obligations under international law, international humanitarian law, human rights law, and refugee law.

Last but not least, I would like to touch upon a very shameful fact that here we are in the 21st century, and we still need to confront famine and food insecurity in so many parts of the world. The most difficult situation in that regard is perhaps in the conflict zones in Africa and Middle East. Tragically, as indicated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, malnutrition underlies nearly half of all child deaths under the age of five globally. Therefore, it is our responsibility to provide basic humanitarian assistance, health and nutrition services to those in need as well as use sanctions against those who restrict safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

If we want to ensure stability and economic growth in the long run, as well as prevent conflicts and build healthy societies based on respect, empathy, and solidarity, we must invest in our best hope for the future. This hope is the safety of children.

Annex LXI

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations

Portugal thanks the Estonian presidency of the Security Council for promoting this timely open debate, in the year we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda and the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, which we fully support.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement submitted by the European Union and by the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and wishes to add the following points in its national capacity.

We welcome the Secretary-General's 2021 report on children and armed conflict and we express our strong concern for the 26,425 grave violations against children verified by the United Nations – an ever-increasing figure.

Portugal condemns all six grave violations against children in armed conflict identified by the Security Council in resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#). These represent serious violations of the rights of the child, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Fighting impunity and ensuring accountability is essential in the prevention of these crimes.

We highlight the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians in armed conflict and to guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to all children in need.

The Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which Portugal has ratified, is a benchmark instrument. The Paris Principles 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, all of which were endorsed by Portugal, are also fundamental documents.

We call on all States that have not done it yet to ratify the Optional Protocol and to endorse these documents. Moreover, we urge State and non-State parties to armed conflict to end all violations against children. We defend the guarantee of support and reparation for survivors, including gender and aged-oriented services, physical and psychological medical care, sexual and reproductive health care.

Attacks on schools have a particularly long-lasting effect, resulting in school dropouts, risking the future of entire generations and disproportionately affecting girls. The safeguarding of education opportunities, under SDG 4, is therefore crucial and contributes to preventing recruitment, as well as child, early and forced marriages.

It is fundamental to incorporate a gender perspective whilst discussing children and armed conflict, in accordance with Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women, peace and security.

We are deeply concerned by the impacts of COVID-19 in health and education systems, in further deteriorating children's situation of vulnerability, as well as in preventing monitoring.

It is essential that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism remain operational. The collection and reporting of data in a transparent and accurate way needs to remain a key concern for the independence, credibility and efficiency of this Mechanism.

It is essential to work on the reintegration of children and the rehabilitation of their families and communities as part of the roadmap to address this problem and to advance the mainstreaming of children's rights.

The protection of children can be a first step to resolve or mitigate conflicts. As such, child protection must be integrated in all peace processes and cease-fire agreements.

Finally, Portugal recognizes and supports the work of UNICEF and other United Nations bodies, as well as the mainstreaming of the children and armed conflict agenda in peace operations. We therefore call for States' cooperation with these entities, as well as with civil society organizations, to protect the rights of children in armed conflict.

Annex LXII

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

The State of Qatar has long recognized that protection children in armed conflict is a key component of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. As Nelson Mandela said “Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation.” (22 November 1997)

Therefore, we note with extreme concern the findings of the report of the Secretary-General ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), that in 2020 violence and hostilities, disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, have continued to have a devastating impact on the situation of children in armed conflict and that the number of grave violations verified remained high. We are appalled by attacks on schools and hospitals, and the military use thereof, have continued throughout 2020, exacerbating the plight of children.

We are also deeply troubled by the report’s findings that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the vulnerability of boys and girls to grave violations, including by hampering their access to education, health and social services, limiting child protection activities and shrinking safe places.

In the same vein, the report of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict titled “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict”, of 3 May 2021, suggests that the pandemic and measures implemented by States to mitigate its effects have likely increased children’s vulnerability to recruitment and use, notably because of school closures and loss of family income. In addition, girls are likely to have become more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence because of reduced mobility and increased isolation.

In this regard, we would like to commend the work done by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in these challenging times of COVID-19.

Places of learning should never be a place of war: the report of the Secretary-General points out, 127 million children were out of school in conflict situations because of insecurity, attacks on schools or related personnel or the military use of schools.

Over a year ago, on 28 May 2020, the General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution [74/275](#), presented by the State of Qatar, designating 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. The day serves as an important reminder of safeguarding schools as safe spaces for children and the need to prioritize all children’s access to education, especially those in vulnerable situations.

The challenge at hand is to make sure the protection of education is reflected and embodied by action on the ground through effective mechanisms that will end impunity for the perpetrators of such attacks, so that the millions of children deprived of education in conflict settings can aspire to a better future. Accountability is key to deterring future attacks.

Therefore, much more must be done. Among some of the deterrent measures is the strengthening of documentation of attacks on education, including the collection of data disaggregated by gender. Attacks on schools and/or hospitals are one of the

six grave violations subject to the monitoring and reporting mechanism, pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and Security Council through resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#), requests the Secretary-General to include in his annual “list of shame” those parties to conflict that commit attacks on schools. The recent Secretary-General report points out “prioritization of data analysis is crucial for early identification and response to prevent the impact of armed conflict on children, through enhanced information collection and analysis, support for national capacities and inclusion of child protection concerns in mediation.”

The State of Qatar has long understood the vital role that reliable data play in monitoring and responding to attacks on education across the globe. Education Above All Foundation (EAA) is at the forefront of efforts to improve access to data on education in emergencies. This data helps to highlight and understand how attacks against education during times of conflict and insecurity deprive children of their right to education. EAA is also supporting the development of humanitarian technology to record data on attacks on schools, teachers and students, and education-related violations of law in order to hold perpetrators of attacks to account. This global data service on attacks on education is a hub for the collection, sorting, analysis, storage and distribution of information about attacks on education for policy-makers, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders.

These efforts depict the State of Qatar’s belief that by working together we can ensure that children everywhere can grow up safe, healthy and educated so they can help to build a secure and sustainable future for themselves, their families and their societies.

To conclude, we extend an invitation to join the efforts of the State of Qatar, UNICEF, UNESCO, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and of the international community to celebrate 9 September as the second International Day to Protect Education from Attack. The aim of the high-level virtual event is to commemorate and promote this important International Day and a call to stop attacks on education, much needed towards global peace, and to promote accountability.

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

At the outset, my delegation commends the President for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict, and offers its deep appreciation to the briefers for their statements. Today's open debate is particularly timely as this year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict agenda. Let me take this opportunity to reiterate my support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Virginia Gamba, and her Office.

My delegation is deeply concerned by the sustained high number of violations against children. According to the Secretary-General's recent annual report on children and armed conflict, 19,379 children in 21 situations were affected by violations; including recruitment, killing, and denial of humanitarian access. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated vulnerabilities of children, while posing additional challenges to child protection capacity and the monitoring and reporting of violations.

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

First, let me reiterate the importance of full implementation of Security Council resolutions 2532 and 2565. In particular, full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access to children in armed conflicts must be ensured to adequately respond to the pandemic. It is particularly concerning to find from the annual report that there were 4,156 incidents of denial of humanitarian access for children in 2020 when the need for humanitarian assistance surged. We echo the call of the Secretary-General for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access in many fragile parts of the world.

Second, gender perspectives must be incorporated into child protection. As the annual report of the Secretary-General rightly pointed out, violations affect boys and girls differently. 85 per cent of children recruited and used were boys, while 98 per cent of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls. Girls are also usually the first to drop out of school and most will never return. As such, it is vital to take a gender-sensitive approach in child protection and reintegration.

Third, we must strengthen our efforts to ensure access to quality education for children in conflict affected settings. Attacks on schools increased in 2020, infringing on children's rights to education. It is also worrisome that the long-term socio-economic impacts of pandemic may aggravate the situation, further depriving so many children around the world of their access to education.

We must be reminded that education is a key to break the cycle of violence, build resilience, and achieve sustainable peace and development. As a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, the Republic of Korea has consistently called for the need to ensure inclusive, equal access to education for all children affected by conflicts, and we will continue our active efforts to this end.

Fourth, the Republic of Korea strongly supports the role of United Nations for child protection, including through United Nations peacekeeping operations and UNICEF. We support United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions in facilitating a protective environment for children affected by armed conflicts. We emphasize the importance of their child protection mandates as well as

the vital role carried out by senior child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions, and believe that they should be adequately resourced. We look forward to furthering our discussion on protection of civilians, including children, at the upcoming Peacekeeping Ministerial to be held in Seoul in December of this year.

Moreover, In order to facilitate the re-integration of children and provide them necessary care, the Republic of Korea has been making contributions to UNICEF, including through providing one million dollars for the “Saving lives and strengthening the protection of Afghan girls and boys affected by armed conflict” project. With the Secretary-General’s recent annual report noting Afghanistan as one of the places where the highest numbers of grave violations were verified, we believe our project has been providing pragmatic support for improving its situation.

Last, but not least, we must ensure accountability of all violations against children and find ways to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law. The Republic of Korea fully supports the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We also believe it is essential to support and strengthen our tools to document and address violations, including the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism, the Security Council Working Group, and the annual report of the Secretary-General.

Violations against children are threats not only to our present, but, more importantly, to our future. If we do not stop and prevent them now, it will get more and more difficult to cut the vicious cycle of violence. The Republic of Korea reaffirms its driving commitment to working with the United Nations, as well as all Member States, with a view towards better protecting children from the scourge of armed conflicts, as well as from the ongoing pandemic.

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

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

I would like to thank the President, for convening this important meeting and the Secretary-General for his annual report, as well as the briefers for their presentations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated precarious situations all over the world and has created new challenges for the most vulnerable groups, including children and especially children affected by armed conflicts.

This year has been particularly difficult also for child protection actors, especially the ones in the field. We remain worried for the difficulties created by the pandemic for the monitoring system and for the complications in the implementation of child protection activities. San Marino commends the dedication of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and of her Office and appreciates the engagement of all the child protection personnel and partners involved. San Marino welcomes the new action plans and commitments which have resulted in a high number of children who have been released.

San Marino is particularly worried by the high number of grave violations reported also this year in the report of the Secretary-General. The killing and maiming of children and their recruitment has reached also this year an alarming level, while abductions and sexual violence have reached an unprecedented level. This new element is of particular concern.

It is clear that the pandemic has created new space and opportunities for violators and this situation needs to be immediately addressed.

Furthermore, rape and sexual violence are generally underreported and the consequences of such violations have negative long-term impact on the life of boys and girls.

The closure of schools due to COVID-19 measures and the loss of income of many families during the pandemic have greatly endangered children. Students have remained out of school, more isolated and more vulnerable to recruitment, abduction and even sexual violence. Girls have been particularly affected since they are often the first ones who drop out of school and the last ones to return. It is therefore important that assistance programmes include the gender dimension.

San Marino firmly condemns attacks on schools, as well as their use for military purposes.

We reiterate our support for the Safe Schools Declaration, an instrument that promotes the protection of students, teachers and schools. We believe that educational facilities that were occupied during the pandemic should return to their primary function, they should be a safe place for children, where students can continue their education and where their hopes for a better future can be nurtured.

San Marino is also particularly worried for the despicable attacks on hospitals and for the threats that medical personnel continue to face, even during an unprecedented health emergency.

We call on all parties to respect medical facilities, as well as to grant access to humanitarian aid, which is particularly needed in this challenging time. The delivery of humanitarian assistance should always be guaranteed.

San Marino calls for a full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law and reiterates the importance of accountability for all grave violations against children. Impunity is totally unacceptable and victims should receive justice and reparation.

We call on all member States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which constitutes a fundamental instrument for the prevention of the recruitment of child soldiers. We also encourage all parties to support other important tools, such as the Paris Principles and Commitments and the Vancouver Principles.

San Marino has also joined the campaign Act to Protect Children, an important campaign to help all children in having a normal life.

Furthermore, San Marino believes that rehabilitation and reintegration of children should always be the focus of all our activities. The best interest of the child should always guide our actions and it should be the focus of reintegration programmes and of future peacebuilding efforts.

We also reiterate the importance of treating children affected by arm conflict as victims, including the ones associated with groups designated as terrorist.

Finally, as reiterated by the Secretary-General, mediation and conflict prevention are fundamental to stop these violations.

San Marino reiterates its full support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, which is vital during this emergency. San Marino also expresses its support for Security Council resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#). During this pandemic, cessation of hostilities is a necessity. Equally important is to guarantee equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, and in humanitarian emergencies.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda and San Marino continues to firmly believe and to support this mandate, including the integrity of the listing mechanism.

The figures of violations reported in the report of the Secretary-General are not only numbers, but actual children who are suffering the most horrific violations. These children need our engagement and our support. San Marino believes that working together, we can build the foundations for a better future for every child living through conflict and crisis.

Together we can win this pandemic, building a strong response to it and creating comprehensive recovery programmes that prioritize children's rights and their protection.

Annex LXV

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations, Abdullah Y. Al-Mouallimi

[Original: Arabic]

The issue of the protection of children in armed conflict is of vital importance to the concept of peacebuilding and the creation of generations able to build a more stable and prosperous future for countries affected by conflict. The international community must handle children caught up in armed conflict with the utmost care, enabling a new reality to be created for them that will break the cycle of violence, address the negative effects of conflict and act upon any signs that an environment conducive to extremism and violence is being created.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes that protection of children in armed conflict around the world is a joint responsibility of the entire international community, requiring a collective and coordinated response to deal with the repercussions and address the causes. My country has acceded to numerous international frameworks in support of this goal.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, which highlights the commitment of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen to protecting children and the effectiveness of the significant and sustained measures it has taken to promote the protection of children in the current conflict in accordance with international terms of reference. The report also reflects the potential of the Coalition to provide a model for other international coalitions for protecting children in armed conflict.

Notwithstanding our reservations about the number of incidents attributed to the Coalition, we note that the conclusions of the Secretary-General's report give the lie to tendentious claims advanced by certain bodies in an attempt to distort the true image of the Coalition for political purposes that have nothing to do with the protection of children but instead use lies to create a hypothetical reality to divert attention from the genuinely constructive role of the Coalition in Yemen.

In this context, we affirm once more our support for the mandate of the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and her positive role in protecting children at international level. We look forward to continuing the proactive cooperation between her and the Coalition with a view to developing the mechanisms for the protection of children in the armed conflict in Yemen.

The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)) confirms once again the destructive role of the Iranian-backed Houthi militia, providing yet more evidence of their unwillingness to end the conflict in Yemen and of the atrocities committed by them against children. Their rejection of peace initiatives and escalation of the conflict against civilians, most recently in Marib, clearly illustrates the violent ideology of this militia and demonstrate its lust for power and lack of concern that their coup against legitimacy and the Yemeni people has drained the country of resources and plunged its people into chaos, hunger and disease. It also demonstrates the negative role played by Iran in the region, imposing its expansionist policy without concern for the destruction visited upon the children of the countries in which it has intervened.

My country calls upon the Security Council and international community to take the necessary measures to compel the Houthi militia to adopt the path of peace and support the efforts of the United Nations to reach a political solution on the basis of the three terms of reference – the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, the outputs of the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, particularly resolution [2216 \(2015\)](#) – and spare the Yemeni people, especially children, further suffering.

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

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

We commend Estonia for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict and we thank the briefers for their insightful presentations. We also appreciate the role of the Secretary-General, and his Special Representative in child protection and promotion of their human rights, and for the strong and concrete engagement by all United Nations partners in advocating for practical measures to protect children.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General and voice our strong concern about the scale and severity of grave violations against children reflected in it. We may commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandate, but children still remain the most vulnerable group in situations of armed conflict, and therefore we need to look ahead, on how to better implement the children and armed conflict mandate.

Unfortunately, grave violations remain at a similar concerning level as last year and it is clear that urgent and effective measures to protect children in all situations of armed conflicts are needed. We firmly condemn the ongoing recruitment and use, killing and maiming of children as well as the denial of humanitarian access to them, as the three most prevalent grave violations verified in 2020. We express particular concern over dramatic increases in abduction and sexual violence, and the long-term negative impact these have on children. We also condemn wide-spread attacks on schools and hospitals, and strongly call on all parties to armed conflict to immediately cease those attacks. Strengthened monitoring and reporting of attacks on education as well as accountability and redress for it is crucial.

The COVID-19 has further exacerbated children's vulnerability to grave violations and complicated the implementation of child protection activities. We underscore the importance of prioritizing children's rights and needs in global COVID-19 response and recovery programmes. In this regard we welcome the study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict, launched last May. With the long-term effects of the pandemic, the call for improved access to safe, quality education, including for girls, during armed conflict is even more acute.

We continue to reiterate our unwavering call for all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to end violations against children. Accountability for all these crimes must be ensured, and perpetrators bring to justice and punished. We simply cannot accept the prevalent impunity for grave violations against children. We call for criminalization of grave violations in domestic laws and for the adoption of effective national accountability measures as well as for Member States to cooperate with international, regional and national accountability mechanisms.

Having ratified Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, endorsed the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration as well as the Vancouver Principles, Slovakia calls on others who have not yet done so to follow this action.

Annex LXVII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations

At the outset we wish to thank the Estonian presidency for organizing this open debate as well as the Secretary-General for his annual report and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, Forest Whitaker and Laban Onisimus for their comprehensive briefings.

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

As we mark the 25 years since the establishment of the children and armed conflict mandate we wish to express our deepest gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations personnel on the ground for their invaluable work in documenting and monitoring violations of children's rights in conflict.

It is deeply saddening that yet again the report before us documents the persistent high numbers and trends of grave violations against children. After acknowledging some progress in 2019 it is particularly disconcerting that the recruitment and use, killing and maiming and denial of humanitarian access represented the most prevalent grave violations in the year 2020.

In the situation of armed conflict children remain among the most vulnerable and COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated these vulnerabilities. It has among others enhanced the barriers impeding their access to education and health. Lack of safe spaces for children has further exposed them to grave violations which is evidenced in the rising trends documented by this year's report.

We are appalled about the dramatic increase in sexual violence. These heinous acts continue to be the most underreported grave violation against children. While they are perpetrated against girls and boys, girls remain disproportionately affected. A gender sensitive approach and response is essential.

As impunity for grave violations against children persist much more must be done to ensure that all perpetrators of violations are held accountable. Ensuring accountability is key to preventing the reoccurrence of such violations and for victims and survivors to receive justice. In this respect we wish to emphasize also the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism as established by Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and its independence, impartiality, and credibility.

We remain deeply concerned about the continued attacks against schools and the alarming rate of denial of humanitarian access to children. Protecting schools against attacks and military use is essential to ensure children's access and their right to education. Moreover, in conflict situations schools are and must remain a safe haven for children. We therefore call on States who have not yet done so, to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol and joining the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

Slovenia remains a strong advocate for child protection and our national efforts aim also at alleviating the pain of children affected by armed conflict and assisting victims of conflict. In this respect we have been supporting several projects to assist children affected by conflicts in Ukraine, Palestine and Syria and we have provided humanitarian aid to UNICEF for Yemeni children. Over 500 children from active or post-conflict areas have received psychological and physical assistance and rehabilitation in Slovenia. Through the "Our rights" project and teaching materials

Slovenia has enabled human rights education for more than 200,000 children around the world which help foster tolerance and understanding of diversity in societies.

While ending grave violations against children sometimes seems an elusive task we are nevertheless able to acknowledge also certain promising developments that reflect the tireless efforts by the Special Representative and her Office. These include the release of more than 12,000 children as well as several action plans that are currently being implemented. In this respect we encourage all parties to the conflict to develop, sign and implement such action plans and to engage with the United Nations representatives in this respect.

Ending violations against children must be at the centre of our efforts to build back a better and more peaceful future as the future we are building belongs to the children.

Annex LXVIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Somalia to the United Nations

At outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the delegation of Estonia for preparing the open debate on the situation of children and armed conflict to share our views. We are pleased that the President is chairing this meeting, since it is of paramount importance for the Council to take stock of developments and strengthen its efforts to assist and protect children in armed conflict. We also wish to thank the Secretary-General and all other briefers for their valuable contributions.

It is my privilege to speak today on behalf of Somalia on the issue of children and armed conflict. The report of the Secretary-General comes at a time when the world faces unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We share views with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations that the rights and needs of children should be a central aspect in all efforts for peace, including mediation and conflict prevention.

We remain concerned over the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict-affected children, which has further exacerbated children's vulnerability to grave violations and complicated the implementation of child protection activities. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize children rights and needs in global COVID-19 response and recovery programmes.

The Somali Government is committed to the protection of children in our country. We continue to work hard to improve the legal framework for the protection and promotion of child rights, as stipulated in national and international frameworks. Moreover, key legislation, such as the National Child Rights Bill, are developed to better protect children in Somalia from grave violations. These provide the basis for further institutional building and government capacity development, given the requisite framework to protect children's rights, including upgrading legislation and policy.

On 3 May 2019, The Federal Government has completed the biometric registration for all Somali National Army and Somali Police Force officers. Moreover, in addition to the biometric registration, proper screening of existing security forces and new recruits ensures the presence of no children. We are more proactively investigating and prosecuting cases of grave violations against children while raising awareness and capacity-building activities for security forces.

I underline the need for increased compliance with child protection mandates, laws and measures for United Nations peacekeeping missions while strengthening their accountability for all grave violations against children in armed conflict. Equally important, the need for a strong partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations, specifically with the African Union, to coordinate and enhance child protection activities in Africa.

We encourage donors to redouble their contributions to child protection, in particular through adequate and sustainable financial support and technical assistance, including to reintegration programmes. There are actual girls and boys in the world who urgently require protection and timely, inclusive reintegration services and assistance programmes, which are currently under-resourced.

To conclude, we are committed to assuming our primary responsibility in the protection of the children within our borders. From that perspective, we recognize and work on durably strengthening our institutional capacities in terms of legislative, judicial and executive branches. The Somali Government will scale up all its efforts to protect the most vulnerable – the youngest among us – and with them our future. Council members may rest assured that Somalia will continue furthering that endeavour.

Annex LXIX**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Mathu Joyini**

At the outset, I wish to thank Estonia for convening the open debate on children and armed conflict. This debate is timely as the year 2021 marks the twenty-fifth Anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda and the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict by the General Assembly.

I also wish to thank the briefers for their insightful briefings and for highlighting the pressing need to protect all children especially those living amidst hostilities and armed conflict.

It is concerning that after 25 years of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, we still witness alarmingly high and grave violations against boys and girls in armed conflict. We are now faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, which seem to have increased children's vulnerability to abduction, recruitment and sexual violence. This is evident in the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, which states that 26,425 verified grave violations were conducted against children in 2020. This is deeply concerning considering that we find ourselves in the midst of a global health emergency.

It is in this context that South Africa continues to advocate for the accelerated and equitable distribution and access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. Preliminary medical studies suggest that the recent variants of the Corona virus spread more easily among unvaccinated persons, including children, putting them at risk of contracting the virus as well. Considering that we are in uncharted waters, we must ensure that each and every individual gets vaccinated, this includes children in armed conflict area situations.

Children have for far too long carried the brunt of war. They represent an alarming percentage of the casualties of war; as refugees and internally displaced children, unaccompanied minors, trafficking or sexual slaves. Their basic rights to education and health are undermined and threatened as schools and hospitals are closed or cease to function for extended periods as a result of violent attacks in many conflict areas. These senseless and violent attacks against children are unacceptable and goes against the grain of international humanitarian law. We thus urge that the perpetrators be held accountable for grave violations against children in armed conflict.

While progress in protecting children in armed conflict is slow, we do note that some progress is being made. In this regard, we welcome the progress in dialogues with warring parties in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Sudan and Syria. We further welcome the new commitments and other engagements that were reached in 2020, to better protect children, including two new action plans signed in Myanmar and South Sudan.

South Africa is encouraged to learn that armed groups and forces freed more than 1,643 children from their ranks following the United Nations engagement, and many more boys and girls were spared from recruitment due to age screening processes in situations where the United Nations has action plans with Governments to stop child recruitment and use.

On 16 June 2021, the African Union commemorated one of the most important AU Charter aimed at advancing children's rights: the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which was adopted 30 years ago, under the theme: "30 years

after the adoption of the Charter: accelerate implementation of Agenda 2040 for an Africa fit for children". The Day of the Child is a demonstration of the African Union's commitment to safeguarding the rights and welfare of the child. It is also an important day to reflect on progress made in implementing the provisions of the Charter and addressing the numerous remaining challenges faced by boys and girls affected by armed conflict.

The collaboration between the African Union Commission's Department for Political Affairs, Peace and Security and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict with the support of UNICEF and its collective effort to protect children from the scourge of violence and war is commended.

With more children suffering horrific abuses in conflict areas across the globe, we desperately need to reinvigorate and double our efforts to raise awareness about the grave violations in order to provide children with the protection they deserve. In this regard, I wish to highlight the following.

Firstly, the international community must take care of the special short-term and long-term needs of children involved in armed conflicts, both while conflicts are occurring and after they are finished. States must undertake all the necessary actions to preserve the fundamental value of the children, as the most precious resources for the future of humankind. To break the cycle of violations affecting children, we must take a systematic and coherent approach, from prevention to accountability and reintegration;

Secondly, we call upon Member States to continue to support existing and develop new implementation action plans to protect children in armed conflict and encourage States to adopt and implement protocols for the handover of children to civilian protection actors; Thirdly, we encourage all peacekeeping operations to undertake all the appropriate and necessary actions to reduce the impact of armed conflicts on the life of children by integrating into the military training the protection and rights of children; and

Lastly, parties to conflict, whether governmental forces or non-State armed groups, must keep schools and hospitals safe and not use them for military purposes. The protection and safety of schools is of particular importance as it forms part of the backbone of any peacebuilding effort, enabling future development growth and sustainable peace.

I wish to conclude by highlighting that children are the most vulnerable at times of armed conflict as they are incapable of taking necessary measures to maintain their wellbeing and are thus entirely dependent on others to meet their survival needs. Therefore, children are not only affected by direct targeting leading to their death or injury but are also gravely affected by any harm to their guardians, homes, schools and hospitals as it puts enjoyment of their basic needs in jeopardy. The international community must take urgent and effective action to put an end to violations of the rules of international law, particularly those relevant to children's rights, and to ensure justice to child victims of grave violations by holding perpetrators accountable. It is our collective responsibility to put an end to these crimes and create the conditions for this generation to enjoy a childhood and youth in dignity and a future in prosperity.

Annex LXX**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations, Agustín Santos Maraver**

[Original: Spanish]

On the occasion of the high-level meeting of the Security Council, Spain aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union and wishes to underline its support for the integrity of the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict as the main advocate of the United Nations for the protection and well-being of children in conflict zones as a problem that affects international peace and security.

Spain defends and supports the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and trusts that it will be adequately reflected in the annual report of the Secretary-General and its annexes. The Government of Spain also welcomes the gender policy implemented by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the disaggregation of data by age and gender. This decision will result in more accurate, timely, objective and reliable information.

We commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, for including Burkina Faso, Cameroon and the Lake Chad region in her annual report and also for her statements on the difficult situation in Cabo Delgado and Tigray. We support her boldness in bringing to light the grave violations against children that occur beyond the 21 situations listed in the 2020 report.

Spain supports and urges States to defend the global child protection agenda. The Security Council has created a strong framework and provided the Office of the Special Representative with tools to respond to violations against children. For this reason, the Government of Spain considers it necessary to hold a mid-term briefing of the Security Council, prior to the next annual open debate, in order to defend the protection of children, consult the work of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and assess the items approved by the Council, as well as possible requests for adequate funding, especially for United Nations peacekeeping and political missions.

Spain is gravely concerned by the high number of cases in which humanitarian access has been denied (4,156 incidents). We call on the parties to respect the prompt, safe and uninterrupted access of humanitarian actors, including child protection actors.

The high number of attacks on hospitals is also a matter of concern for our country. These aggressions must be condemned and curtailed without delay. Schools must also be safe places. The 927 attacks on schools and hospitals in 2020 are too many. We recall the need to respect and implement Security Council resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#) and call on States that have not yet done so to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. The Fourth Safe Schools Conference, to be held in Nigeria, offers an opportunity to endorse the declaration and to advocate for safe education in conflict. Spain is pleased to be able to provide technical support to Nigeria in the organization of this Conference, the successor to the Third Safe Schools Conference, held in Palma de Mallorca in 2019.

We also condemn the 90 per cent exponential increase in rape and other forms of sexual violence against minors in 2020. We must be vigilant and reduce this percentage in 2021. The international community's priority in this regard must be to focus on protecting the victims and condemning the perpetrators. As States governed

by the rule of law, we have a responsibility to provide protection for victims through national courts and, where appropriate, through the International Criminal Court.

In 2021, Spain will remain committed to the monitoring and reporting mechanism, supporting its funding, as well as to reintegration mechanisms and programmes, an important avenue for redressing the rights of victims violated by recruitment and use, among other grave violations.

Annex LXXI

Statement by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. and Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, Adrian Hauri

[Original: French]

Switzerland thanks Estonia for organizing this debate, and thanks the speakers for their contributions.

“The number of grave violations against children [has] remained unacceptably high”, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict warned the Human Rights Council in March 2021, and that alarming observation is reaffirmed in the annual report that has just been published. Respect for children’s rights continues to erode, and Switzerland is deeply concerned by the continuation of armed conflicts in the world and their devastating impact on children.

We would like to stress three considerations to improve the protection of children:

First, children in armed conflicts must primarily and above all be considered victims and treated accordingly. Children, especially those associated with an armed group or whose parents are affiliated with such a group, including groups designated as terrorist groups, are still children and therefore entitled to special protection. This is why child protection capacities on the ground, prevention of recruitment, and rehabilitation and reintegration, need to be strengthened. We call on the Security Council to include strong language on respect for children’s rights and international humanitarian law in its resolutions in order to ensure that peace operations are staffed with the necessary specialized personnel. This is particularly important in the context of mission transitions.

Second, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the measures taken to stop the spread of the virus have increased children’s – particularly girls’ – vulnerability to violence and psychosocial distress. Despite these extraordinary circumstances, protection staff have been there on the ground to continue to protect many thousands of children around the world. Member States must ensure that all responses to the pandemic comply with international law, that all measures to combat the virus are lawful, necessary and proportionate and that children in armed conflicts are given the assistance and protection they need. Moreover, the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire during the pandemic is the most immediately-required measure to minimize the risk to children. We call on the Security Council to support the swift implementation of resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#) in all situations on its agenda.

Third, we must strengthen the instruments available to prevent and stop violations against children. The monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children’s rights in situations of armed conflict, as well as the Secretary-General’s annual report, including its annex, are crucial in this regard. Switzerland, for its part, is engaged in advocacy efforts as co-chair of the Group of Friends in Yemen and Syria, and also supports the reporting mechanism’s work in Syria, in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). We reiterate our call on the Secretary-General to continue to provide, on the basis of the reporting mechanism’s data, a comprehensive, impartial and accurate list of parties committing grave violations of children’s rights.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Her work remains essential. The United Nations, including the Security Council, has all the necessary tools to mark this anniversary with strengthened commitment. As a Security Council candidate, Switzerland will continue to work for the protection of children – because by protecting children, we are empowering them to contribute to a more peaceful world.

Annex LXXII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations

Thailand welcomes the annual report by the Secretary-General. We further note with appreciation the continued hard work and dedication by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on this important issue.

Thailand joins the international community in expressing concern for the plight of children in armed conflict, whose vulnerabilities are more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, we call on all parties to heed the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire, and to prioritize protection and humanitarian access to children and other vulnerable groups.

Thailand also strongly condemns all violence and crimes against children in armed conflict. We will continue to support the effective implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions on this issue.

In this regard, Thailand wishes to highlight the following points:

First, we must continue to forge an even stronger partnership on child protection.

Thailand appreciates the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's continued engagement with States and supports increased efforts in this regard. We encourage the identification of areas of cooperation where the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and United Nations agencies can play a constructive role in strengthening Member States' child protection capacities.

In addition, greater multi-stakeholder and inclusive partnership can contribute to the efforts in addressing emerging challenges to child protection. Examples of collaboration between Member States, United Nations agencies and the civil society can include community outreach and education to prevent children from online recruitment tactics and incorporating child protection in pandemic response and recovery measures.

Second, we must continue to mainstream child protection in the peace agenda.

Peacekeepers do not serve as the frontline to peacekeeping missions, but can also play a vital role as early peacebuilders who help build environments conducive for better livelihoods of the children and vulnerable groups in conflict and transition areas.

Thailand underscores the importance of capacity-building for peacekeepers to enable them to fulfil their child protection mandate. We also stress the need for adequate funding and resources as well as clear and realistic mission mandates. This is to ensure effective peacekeeping and smooth transition to peacebuilding and post-conflict development.

Third, we must continue to address the root causes of armed conflict

To transform conflicts and ensure sustaining peace, we must tackle their root causes. Major common elements include poverty, discrimination, social injustice, and economic and social exclusion of persons and communities. It is important that in this endeavour we seek to advance security, development, and human rights at all stages of the peace continuum.

For our part, Thailand highly prioritizes sustainable development as a key to root out conflict. We are developing a sustainable development training course for

our peacekeeping personnel based on our applied experience with local communities in conflict and transition areas. We found that our homegrown approach to sustainable development, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, can indeed provide the local population with livelihood skills to tackle some of the challenges that led them into conflict.

Finally, the international community must continue to work towards a world where children are no longer drawn into armed conflict. Thailand remains fully committed to doing our part and looks forward to working with others to amplify our efforts.

Annex LXXIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu**

At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the Estonian presidency for convening today's Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict.

I thank the Secretary-General for his report and his address today to the Security Council. I would also like to thank the briefers, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, Forest Whitaker and Laban Onisimus of Plan International for their contributions.

We commend the efforts of the United Nations in taking the children and armed conflict agenda forward.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the children and armed conflict by the General Assembly.

This anniversary provides an opportunity to take stock of our achievements and to discuss further efforts to keep children from harm's way as the severe effects of conflicts on children continue to constitute a significant challenge.

The annual report of the Secretary-General highlights the dire situation of children in armed conflict. We sadly see that similar to previous years, the highest numbers of violations are the recruitment and use of children and the killing and maiming. We are equally disturbed by the sharp increase in the cases of abduction and sexual violence against children.

As underlined in the report, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated existing vulnerabilities of children, including by hampering their access to education, health and social services, limiting child protection activities and shrinking safe spaces.

The pandemic has also reduced the capacity of national, regional and international actors to engage in prevention, and protection work, and to provide psychosocial support for children affected by sexual violence. The effects are manifold and children are expected to feel the various repercussions of the pandemic through years to come.

We need to step up our efforts to ensure that the United Nations country task forces on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children have adequate resources to fulfil their mandate, which has become even more challenging in the context of the pandemic.

We also concur with the Secretary-General's call to ensure that child protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

In addition, we see the repatriation and reintegration of children as important aspects of this agenda. Turkey fully subscribes to the Secretary-General's appeal to the countries concerned to take steps for the voluntary repatriation of children, including those with alleged links to DAESH.

The report of the Secretary-General reveals once again that the plight of children continues unabated in many parts of the world.

As for Syria, the destructive war that Assad has waged against his own people had a staggering impact on children. The war has left the lives and the future of a generation of Syrian children hanging by a thread. Almost 12,000 children were killed or injured throughout the conflict.

The crimes of the regime are not the only menaces Syrian children face. Well-documented crimes of the terrorist organization PKK and its Syrian branch PYD/YPG in relation to the recruitment of young girls and boys over the years continue to be a source of grave concern.

PYD/YPG, hiding behind the name of “Syrian Democratic Forces” (SDF), employs the same tactics as other terrorist organizations operating in Syria, such as DAESH, Al-Qaeda, Al-Nusrah and other affiliated groups. As such, they deserve no less condemnation.

As recently as March of this year, the Assad regime attacked the Atarib hospital. A few weeks ago, Al Shifa Hospital in Afrin was targeted by PKK/YPG terrorists. We strongly condemn these attacks and reiterate our expectation from the Security Council to ensure that these grave violations of international humanitarian law are investigated and the perpetrators are held accountable.

While we fully support the efforts of the United Nations to document PKK/PYD/YPG’s and other terrorist groups’ crimes, we must stress the need to demonstrate a unified front against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and refrain from any act, including signing commitments that would be exploited by terrorists in their search for recognition and legitimacy.

On the other hand, latest incidents in Manbij bear testimony to the local population’s resistance to PKK/YPG’s oppression and persecution. At least eight people were killed and scores injured as a result of live rounds fired by PKK/YPG to disperse locals protesting against its forced recruitment policies. We expect the next report of the Secretary-General to include these developments, along with an adequate assessment of PKK/YPG’s recruitment strategy of children in the area.

In addition, as revealed by the Secretary-General on different occasions, PKK/YPG, in its attempt to fuel its separatist ideology and gain legitimacy in Syria, use tactics to impose arbitrary school curricula, arrest teachers and block humanitarian aid.

I would like to put on record Turkey’s stance with regards to the unfortunate references in the report to Turkey’s counter-terrorism operations in Syria and in Iraq which emanate from its legitimate right of self-defence in accordance with international law. All activities carried out by the Turkish Armed Forces during those operations are conducted exclusively towards terrorist targets, with utmost attention and care to avoid any harm to civilians or civilian infrastructure.

Meeting the fundamental humanitarian needs of children in conflicts and emergencies, including the provision of health and education services must be one of our main priorities. Turkey, on its part, takes all necessary measures to alleviate the suffering of children fleeing armed conflict in its region and beyond.

For the Syrian children who are under temporary protection in Turkey, we have succeeded to constantly increase the school enrolment rate. I would also like to note that health services are provided free of charge for all Syrians including children in Turkey. This has been particularly crucial during the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic on the health systems worldwide.

As for the children living in northwest Syria where schools and hospitals have been indiscriminately targeted, Turkey does its utmost to rehabilitate many public buildings, which were once used by the said terrorist groups. In this vein, Turkish Government has repaired and made 426 schools operational in Ras al-Ayn and Tal Abyad area, which provide education for approximately 45,000 students.

Furthermore, Turkey plays a vital role in northwest Syria as the only corridor for the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid of the United Nations where more than 4 million people live, 80 percent of whom are women and children.

These people struggle to survive with aid arriving through Bab al Hawa crossing point. The continuation of the United Nations cross-border assistance mechanism, which provides uninterrupted and unhindered humanitarian access is crucial for children living in this region. We urge all Council members to provide these innocent children with long-term support and certainty. Renewing the cross-border resolution for another 12 months, including re-opening of additional crossing points would be an important step in that direction.

My Government fully shares and supports the agenda of the United Nations in addressing the situation of children in armed conflict.

We will continue to work closely with the Special Representative's Office.

In concluding, I would like to underline Turkey's unwavering support to all international and regional efforts related to the protection of children.

Annex LXXIV**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations**

I would like to express my appreciation to the Estonian presidency for holding this important debate to discuss current state and challenges of the protection of children in armed conflict.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, for presenting his report on the issue which testifies that children remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the situations of armed conflict. We are deeply concerned over the alarming scale and grave violations committed against children, as documented in the mentioned report, in particular in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Syria, the Sahel and Lake Chad basin regions.

As we mark this year the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict agenda, this topic remains one of the priorities of the Council and receives broad attention from the international community while children continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts.

The ongoing conflicts, damage and destruction of civilian infrastructure including schools and hospitals, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas remain of particular concern. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated existing problems of the civilian's insecurity, especially children during the armed conflict.

Violence, threats and attacks against medical care in violations of international humanitarian law persist. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the already weak healthcare systems in armed conflict have been overwhelmed, and healthcare service has been undermined at a time it is most needed in order to provide assistance to children.

Ukraine has always been consistent in its policy on ensuring the protection of children in situation of armed conflict. We were among the first States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as to endorse the Paris Commitments and Principles.

The report reflects the general situation of thousands of children in conflicts. Unfortunately, many cases remain outside the scope of attention of the report, as there is not a single word in the document regarding the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict.

It is quite baffling given that many of the United Nations bodies, agencies and funds, like the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF and others, report extensively on the dire situation of children who suffer from the conflict that has been ongoing for the last seven years.

Ukraine is among the most severely affected places in the world in terms of casualties because of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. This is one of the main causes of conflict-related child casualties, leaving many children with lifelong disabilities.

Attacks on schools and regular interruptions of educational process negatively affected education and general development of hundreds of thousands of children living near the contact line which regularly face shelling, landmines and explosive remnants of war. Militarization of education in the occupied territories, amounting to brainwashing and indoctrination, is also a cause of specific concern.

In this regard, I would like to repeat my call to include the reference to the situation of Ukrainian children, living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, in future relevant United Nations thematic reports.

We share the call of the Secretary-General to adopt and implement legislation criminalizing violations of the rules of international law pertaining to the protection of children in armed conflict. It is high time to pursue accountability and to strengthen collective responsibility to prevent, stop and ensure non-repetition of attacks against civilians in conflict situations. This should remain a priority.

As a result of violation by one of the permanent members of the Security Council of norms and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law, now it is more than seven years since the Russian-Ukrainian international armed conflict continues to take lives of civilians in my country. The conflict and the temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, turned the subject of protection of civilians to a very practical and daily issue for my country.

Many children in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as pointed out by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in its 2020 thematic report “Impact of conflict on educational facilities and children’s access to education in Eastern Ukraine”, “have spent a significant portion of their childhoods under the constant threat of violence and insecurity due to the conflict ... Schoolchildren and teachers along the contact line have been at constant risk from shelling or small-arms fire, as well as from the mines and UXO that litter the area. They are at risk of death, injury, or of having their schools rendered inoperable due to damage”.

Attacks on education in situations of conflict do not confine to physical safety or school premises only. Children’s mindsets are also among the main targets for the aggressor in Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict.

Anti-Ukrainian propaganda and hate speech have gained a foothold in the school programmes, written by the Russian occupation administration.

According to the Ukrainian Ombudsperson, in 2020 all schools in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions had to introduce Russian education standards. The Russian occupation administration attempts to expand its creeping annexation attempts on schoolchildren, subjecting them to brainwashing practices.

Militarization of children in occupied territories of Donbas and Crimea, in particular their enrolment in militarized movements aims at preparing them to wage a war. According to available information, they train in using weapons, shooting and installing landmines.

As a result, numerous sources, including the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, reported that minors took part in active hostilities as part of the Russian occupation forces. This practice is a violation of the laws and customs of war and qualifies as a war crime.

Propaganda among children aimed at ensuring a voluntary enrolment of the occupied territories residents in the army is prohibited by article 51 (1) of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In Crimea, such propaganda constitutes not only an international humanitarian law violation, but also a way of committing a war crime as compelling to serve in the enemy’s armed forces. The occupation power has set up an entire system of education and sports events for children ensuring a continuous propaganda of military service in the Russian army among children.

We reiterate that according to article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, to which the Russian Federation and Ukraine are participants, States Parties

shall take all feasible measures to prevent recruitment or use in hostilities of persons under the age of 18 years.

It is also inappropriate that over 200 of Crimean children, mostly Crimean Tatars, have been partly left without parental care due to the imprisonment of their fathers under fabricated and politically motivated grounds. These children are being psychologically traumatized while observing brutal searches in their houses and detention of their parents.

Ukraine pays special attention to the issues related to compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights in armed conflicts as well as preventing and responding to forced displacement, protecting women and children affected by armed conflict, including conflict-related sexual violence.

By contrast, another party to a conflict – the Russian Federation – is ignoring the General Assembly resolutions and the OHCHR recommendations, practicing a “cherry-picking” approach to the obligations under international humanitarian law. Last year Russia revoked the statement made in relation to the ratification of Additional protocol I to the Geneva Conventions related to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. This statement recognized the competence of the International Fact-finding Commission, which is a key mechanism in achieving objectives, undertaken by the States parties to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and to Protocol I, to “respect” and “ensure respect” for the provisions of those treaties.

Time and again, we urge Russia to uphold all its obligations under applicable international law as an occupying power, in particular to ensure proper and unimpeded access of international human rights monitoring missions and human rights non-governmental organizations to Crimea, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [71/205](#), [72/190](#), [73/263](#), [74/168](#) and [75/192](#); immediately release without preconditions of Ukrainian citizens, who were unlawfully detained; end the practice of forcible transfers and deportations of protected persons, including detainees, to areas outside the occupied territory; refrain from compelling residents of Crimea to serve in the armed forces of the Russian Federation.

Annex LXXV

Statement by the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations

The cost of conflict, as war too often demonstrates, is borne by the most vulnerable members of society. Children pay with their lives for the devastating economic and humanitarian consequences of war. Survivors of conflict, including children, are left with the burden of rebuilding destroyed communities. The unrelenting spread of COVID-19, particularly in conflict-affected areas, exacerbates the effects of war. We come together today to express our outrage at violations of international law against children; and to restate our commitment to the agenda first endorsed here 25 years ago: every child deserves protection from the ravages of war, so they may enjoy a life of safety, fulfilment, and happiness.

Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates would like to reaffirm its deep commitment to the protection of children in conflict, in accordance with international law and the Security Council framework on children and armed conflict. We take this opportunity to commend the tireless efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and her Office, to strengthen the protection of children in conflict situations around the world. Further, as a member of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, the United Arab Emirates reiterates its commitment to continue our strong engagement and cooperation with the Special Representative, which, together with the protective and precautionary measures the Coalition has taken, is recognized in the decision to maintain the delisting of the Coalition for a second year.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned by the findings in the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Even with the challenges to verification and reporting of incidents caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there continues to be a sustained high number of grave violations against children, reaching almost 24,000 verified violations committed in 2020 alone.

Against that backdrop, COVID-19 has increased children's vulnerability and posed considerable challenges to educational and healthcare systems. These challenges underline the necessity of unimpeded, safe and timely humanitarian and medical access. It is concerning that, even in the midst of a global pandemic, the number of verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access has remained at roughly 2019 levels. The United Arab Emirates condemns the significant rise in the denial of humanitarian access to children by the Houthis in Yemen, who, as noted by the Secretary-General, remain the overwhelming perpetrator of all such verified violations in Yemen. The United Arab Emirates has emphasized the provision of medical care and lifesaving assistance in conflict situations globally, including equipment and much-needed medicine, as well as serving as a logistical hub for the delivery of humanitarian assistance around the world.

Considering the strain COVID-19 has placed on humanitarian assistance, there is a need to prioritize mechanisms and institutions that protect children in conflict areas. It is particularly critical that the United Nations system has the resources to implement its mandate. In this regard, the United Arab Emirates contributed \$37.5m to UNICEF in 2021, and in total over \$100 million in recent years, to support its crucial efforts in expanding access and protecting children in Yemen.

It is also important to recognize that conflict affects girls and boys differently. In particular, the Secretary-General noted 85 per cent of children recruited and used in combat in 2020 were boys, however 98 per cent of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls. The prevention of conflict-related sexual violence against children

should be at the heart of this agenda. This can only be achieved by embedding gender-sensitive efforts not only in our responses to conflict, but also in our efforts towards conflict-prevention.

In order to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on children, the United Arab Emirates would like to propose two recommendations:

First, we must develop and promote reintegration programming as a shared responsibility to support children coming out of conflict and re-joining their communities. Child soldiers suffer from serious and long-lasting physical and psychological harm, which can impede their ability to recover and participate in their community. Moreover, to be successful, reintegration typically requires medium to long-term engagement that can address children's and their families' needs. In light of the rising need, particularly given the constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, our focus should be on providing support, in partnership with affected States, to develop the capacity and viability of rehabilitation and reintegration services for both boys and girls.

Second, we must ensure approaches to protect all children are implemented in a gender-sensitive manner. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen an alarming rise in sexual and gender-based violence, as well as severe limitations to access to education and essential medical services. Girls and young women are disproportionately affected by conflict, and their needs must be addressed adequately. This includes tackling harmful social norms that lead to the stigmatization of survivors.

As 2021 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its commitment to the promotion of the rights of children in areas of armed conflict and the rehabilitation of survivors – to ensure a bright future for all. This commitment will guide us as we work with fellow Security Council Members during our 2022–2023 term. We look forward to collectively strengthen the progress made thus far and develop new ways to further this agenda.

Annex LXXVI

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations, Abdullah Al-Saadi

Nelson Mandela once said “Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation.” And yet, children continue to suffer from conflicts and are forced to live with its consequences.

I cannot stress more the importance of the international community’s collective effort to prevent grave violations against children. Thus, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her commitment in this regard.

In Yemen, the Houthi militia continues to present a great threat to children. They continue to kill, maim, abduct, sexually violate, and recruit children in their absurd war against the Yemeni people. Since 2014, the Houthis have recruited 12,054 children to fight, of which 308 are below 11 years old, and 6,729 are actively fighting in the Houthi frontlines.

In their efforts to mobilize fighters, the Houthis use schools, mosques and summer camps where they brainwash children, train them in a hurry to send them to die in the frontlines, including in the recent offensive against Marib city.

The Houthis grave violations against children are not limited to only areas under their control. Besides using schools for military activities, they target schools in the Government-controlled areas, attack camps for internally displaced persons, and kill children in their random attacks against civilian facilities, most notably the recent attack against a gas station in Marib, where children were killed, including one that was burned beyond recognition. In addition, the Houthi snipers continue to inhumanly take the lives of children in Taiz. The international community must act immediately to stop these Houthis heinous crimes against children and the Yemeni people.

The Government of Yemen is sparing no effort to protect children and alleviate their suffering. Although the war has created unstable conditions, the Government continues its commitments under international law, including in regards to children. The Government efforts to prevent child recruitment includes the following:

- In 2014, the Government and UNICEF signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.
- In 2017, the Government endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration to prevent the use of schools in armed conflict.
- In 2018, the Government adopted a handover protocol on the release of children caught fighting for the Houthis in the battlefield, and adopted with the UNICEF a road map to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Immediately, the vice president issued a directive to all armed forces to adhere to the protocol and the road map.
- In 2020, a presidential and a military directives were issued to prevent the recruitment of children into the armed forces; establish child protection units; demobilize and hand over recruited children under the age of 18 to agreed civilian bodies in the field of child protection to ensure their return to civilian life; and prosecute all military or civilian personnel who participated or were part of a fraudulent operation for recruiting children.

The Government of Yemen is also working with partners, including King Salman Centre for Relief and Humanitarian Aid to establish specialized centres for

rehabilitation of children involved in military actions, who were recruited by the Houthi militias. This includes training specialists in several governorates to enhance awareness and mobilize the community to participate in preventing child recruitment.

The Government of Yemen has noted the recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Although the report welcomed the steps taken by the Government to protect children, it failed to translate this progress into a delisting. The Government of Yemen is concerned that despite the vast difference between the Government and the Houthi militia in terms of nature, actions and cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and its country team in Yemen, the report depends on unreliable sources and is distributing the guilt among the parties in Yemen.

In addition, the Government notes that the representation of United Nations agencies in Aden, Marib and Taiz, including of those in relation to children and armed conflict remains insufficient to the level of cooperation and engagement shown by the Government. In contrary, the Houthis continue their crimes in disregard to international norms and conventions despite the high-level representation of the United Nations in Sana'a. Thus, the Government invites, again, the United Nations agencies to increase the level of their representation in Government-controlled areas, where they enjoy free movement and reporting, and away from the Houthi influence or restrictions. This should enhance the transparency of the reporting, allowing for better accountability.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm the steadfast commitment of the Government of Yemen to protecting children and preventing grave violations against them. In particular, I would like to reiterate the government's readiness to continue and enhance the ongoing cooperation with the international community, including through the work of Virginia Gamba and her team to protect children in Yemen and around the world.
