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Children and armed conflict in Nigeria

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which covers the period from January 2020 to December 2021, is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict. It is the third report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Nigeria and contains information on the impact of armed conflict on children during the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021.

The report is focused on the three conflict-affected states in north-east Nigeria, namely, Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. Highlighted herein are grave violations against children committed by parties to the conflict, including Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, notably Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad and Islamic State West Africa Province, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and the Nigerian Security Forces.

In the report, the Secretary-General notes that, despite a decrease in verified grave violations against children compared with previous years, the highly volatile and rapidly evolving security situation in north-eastern Nigeria continued to have a negative impact on the protection of conflict-affected children. He presents trends and provides information on verified violations, notably the abduction of children, which was the most prominent violation verified. The detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups is also highlighted as an issue of concern.

In the report, the Secretary-General highlights the efforts made by the Government of Nigeria and by CJTF to strengthen the framework to respond to, end and prevent grave violations against children. The report also contains recommendations for ending and preventing grave violations in Nigeria and improving the protection of children.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the third report of the Secretary-General on the situation of children affected by armed conflict in Nigeria. Covering the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021, it contains information on the trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children since the previous report ([S/2020/652](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on children and armed conflict in Nigeria ([S/AC.51/2020/8](#)). In the report, the Secretary-General outlines information on the grave violations committed against children in north-east Nigeria, as well as progress made and challenges involved in addressing those violations, and provides specific recommendations aimed at strengthening child protection in Nigeria. Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations were identified. In that regard, in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/76/871-S/2022/493](#)), Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, including Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), remained listed for five grave violations against children in annex II, section A, as parties that had not put in place measures to improve the protection of children.

2. The information contained in the present report was documented and verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Nigeria, which is co-chaired by the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Monitoring and reporting of grave violations was challenged by insecurity, especially in some areas under the control or influence of armed groups in the northern region of Borno State, such as in the Abadam, Marte and Kukawa Local Government Areas and some locations around the Sambisa forest area, including villages around the Gwoza, Bama, Konduga, Damboa, Chibok and Askira/Uba Local Government Areas. The information contained herein therefore does not represent the full extent of the grave violations committed in Nigeria during the reporting period, and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher.

II. Overview of political and security developments

3. During the reporting period, north-east Nigeria continued to face heightened insecurity. Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, notably JAS and ISWAP, remained a security threat and continued to carry out brutal attacks against civilians, including children and humanitarian workers, and against the Nigerian Security Forces. Those attacks triggered mass population displacements and heightened the risks of grave violations against children. In the first half of 2020, more than 1.8 million people in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States still lived in internally displaced persons camps or were hosted in communities that were themselves extremely vulnerable. By the end of 2020, close to 2 million Nigerians in the north-east, 78 per cent of whom were women and children, were internally displaced, and 256,000 were refugees in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. By the end of the reporting period in December 2021, there were 1.72 million internally displaced persons in the north-east, with Borno State hosting over 80 per cent of internally displaced population.

4. Humanitarian access remained limited in various areas of the north-east, owing to insecurity and government restrictions. The targeting of aid workers and humanitarian supply routes by JAS and ISWAP adversely affected the delivery of services and programmes on nutrition, education and other humanitarian response programmes for children. Furthermore, national military authorities continued to impose undue restrictions and requirements on humanitarian agencies, which impeded their ability to deliver timely and effective aid and which run contrary to the

principle of humanitarian independence. Among other constraints, humanitarian agencies were restricted from operating outside Government-controlled areas and had to undergo lengthy processes to obtain compulsory authorization for moving personnel, cash and cargo carrying relief materials in the north-east region.

5. Since the end of 2020, attacks by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups against civilians, humanitarian agencies and Nigerian Security Forces increased. The period was also marked by clashes between JAS and ISWAP and by Nigerian Security Forces military operations against those groups. The leader of JAS, Abubakar Shekau, reportedly died during clashes with ISWAP in May 2021. That represented a pivotal moment and led to a gradual weakening of JAS. Since then, remaining elements have increased their activities. In October of the same year, the Nigerian Security Forces announced the death of the leader of ISWAP, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, and, subsequently, of his successor, Malam Bako. Since then, a new trend was observed, with an extension of Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups operations beyond north-eastern Nigeria into the north-west of the country. The violence reportedly included kidnappings of students for ransom. For example, the abduction of more than 340 children in the north-western state of Katsina in December 2020 was allegedly linked to JAS.

6. In April 2021, the Nigerian Security Forces renamed its Operation *Lafiya Dole*, against Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, to Operation *Hadin Kai*, which means “cooperation” in the Hausa language.

7. In May 2021, following the reported death of JAS leader Abubakar Shekau, the Borno State government actively engaged with commanders of JAS in order to seek its surrender. The Borno State government indicated that there would be no prosecution or judicial procedures against defectors. According to Nigerian Security Forces sources, by December 2021, an estimated 16,000 defectors linked to JAS associates and their families, including children, had surrendered to the authorities in Borno State. The mass surrenders may be the result of several factors, including the harsh living conditions in the Sambisa forest, where many JAS elements lived; the lack of leadership within JAS; fighting between JAS and ISWAP; and Nigerian Security Forces military operations against both groups. Information received by the country task force from Borno State government authorities indicated that the majority of persons exiting JAS were women and children.

8. From June to December 2021, 7,704 individuals, including 2,924 children (1,603 boys, 1,321 girls), who had left JAS, were registered by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development of Borno State in the Hajj, Shokari and Bulumkutu transit centres in Maiduguri, Borno State. The children, including those who were associated with JAS or dependents of JAS elements, were hosted in the transit centres pending family reunification and reintegration back into their communities. While the defections may signal a weakening of JAS, they have also created a measure of anxiety within some of the receiving communities, in the absence of a formal, comprehensive and integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

9. In August 2021, the government of Borno State hosted a forum with various stakeholders, including national authorities, the military, religious leaders and civil society organizations, to discuss the security situation in the state, in the light of the mass surrender of JAS elements, associates and family members, and their return to their communities. Among other topics, participants focused on the call for a robust disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration program and the provision of support to all victims of the insurgency, especially women and children.

10. In October 2021, the government of Borno State announced plans to close all internally displaced persons camps within Maiduguri city by 31 December 2021. By mid-December 2021, five camps in Maiduguri had been closed, and their populations

relocated to Damasak, Auno and various other localities in the Bama, Jere, Monguno, Marte, Guzamala, Gwoza and Konduga Local Government Areas or provided with a cash option to remain within communities in Maiduguri city. It was estimated that, as at the end of December 2021, about 74,000 displaced persons, including an unknown number of children, had been relocated. Those relocations represented an increased risk of recruitment and re-recruitment of children by JAS and ISWAP, owing to the continued presence of armed groups around areas of return. It also represented a concern for the smooth continuation of the UNICEF protection programs initiated in the internally displaced persons camps, as they had to be swiftly reoriented and implemented in the new locations of return.

11. In a significant milestone, the Borno State House of Assembly passed its child protection bill in December 2021, which was signed into law by the Governor on 10 January 2022. The law contains provisions on accountability for perpetrators of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and on other forms of violence and exploitation against children.

12. In another positive development, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), with the support of the government of Borno State, continued to sustain its efforts to implement the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children signed with the United Nations in 2017. CJTF was delisted from the annex to the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), following a decrease in cases of child recruitment and use.

III. Grave violations against children

13. From January 2020 to December 2021, the country task force verified 694 grave violations against 532 children (279 boys, 250 girls, 3 sex unknown) in the three conflict-affected states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa in north-east Nigeria. A total of 58 children were victims of multiple violations, including 14 children (12 boys, 2 girls) who were abducted and recruited and used, 42 girls who were victims of abduction, recruitment and use and sexual violence, and 2 girls who were raped and killed.

14. The main perpetrators were Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups (610), notably JAS (333) and ISWAP (277), followed by the Nigerian Security Forces (32) and CJTF (3). A total of 49 violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators.

15. Overall, there was a decrease in grave violations compared with the previous report, when 5,741 grave violations were verified, but which covered a three-year period. However, grave violations escalated within the reporting period, with 250 grave violations verified in 2020 and 444 verified in 2021. The abduction of children remained a key concern in 2021, with the highest number of children verified as having been abducted (211) since 2014.

16. The overall reduction in grave violations verified may be explained by several factors, including the loss of territory previously controlled by JAS and ISWAP and the implementation of the CJTF action plan addressing the recruitment and use of children, as well as access constraints for the country task force to the most affected areas in north-east Nigeria.

17. Notwithstanding the decrease in verified grave violations attributed to JAS and ISWAP during the reporting period and compared with the previous period, the two armed groups continued to represent a serious threat to the protection of children in Nigeria and across the Lake Chad basin region.

18. Furthermore, in March 2020, the Government of Nigeria announced movement restrictions across the country, as part of measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19

pandemic. Although those restrictions affected the movements of the members of the country task force to verify reported incidents of grave violations, it had minimal effects on the activities of the task force, as restrictive measures in north-east Nigeria lasted only for a short period.

A. Recruitment and use of children

19. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 70 children (13 boys, 57 girls), aged between 6 and 17 years, during 2020 (7) and 2021 (63). The main perpetrators were JAS (49) and ISWAP (19), followed by CJTF, which used 2 children to operate a checkpoint. All violations occurred in Borno State. Of that total, 34 children were released or escaped during the reporting period, and 36 remained associated with JAS or ISWAP as at the time of reporting.

20. A significant decrease was observed in the verified numbers of child recruitment and use, compared with the previous reporting period, when 3,601¹ children were verified as having been recruited and used by parties to conflict over a period of three years. Although the previous report covered a longer timeframe, the decrease is noteworthy. Nonetheless, an increase in violations was observed within the reporting period, with a total of 63 children (9 boys, 54 girls) verified to have been recruited and used in 2021, compared with 7 during all of 2020. That increase may be due to the number of children abducted by JAS and ISWAP in previous years who had escaped during the reporting period and whose cases could only be verified upon their release. For example, in the first quarter of 2021, the country task force verified the recruitment and use of 24 children (4 boys, 20 girls) by JAS (21) and ISWAP (3) in Borno State. The children had been recruited between 2015 and 2020 and used until their escape and surrender to Nigerian security forces in early 2021. This led to their release to civilian child protection actors and to the verification of their cases.

21. The recruitment and use of children often led to or followed other grave violations. Most children (56) were verified to have been recruited through abduction, including 42 girls who were sexually abused during their association. Children associated with JAS and ISWAP were used as combatants, as well as in support roles, such as cleaners or cooks, for intelligence gathering and for sexual purposes. For example, in November 2021, the country task force verified the case of a 17-year-old boy used as a spy by ISWAP in the Damboa Local Government Area. All 42 girls who were subjected to sexual violence were used as sexual slaves and forcibly married to JAS and ISWAP combatants during their association with the groups in 2020 (9) and 2021 (33). In May 2020, two boys were used by CJTF at a checkpoint in an internally displaced persons camp in the Ngala Local Government Area, to search suspected persons and vehicles.

22. Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no new verified cases of children used as carriers of explosive devices. However, this remained a serious concern in the light of the elevated number of children, including a high proportion of girls, abducted during the reporting period and who might be used to that end.

Deprivation of liberty for alleged association with armed groups

23. The Nigerian Security Forces continued to apprehend children on suspicion of involvement with Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups during security sweeps, military operations and screening procedures outside internally displaced persons camps and on the basis of information provided by informants. In many cases,

¹ This number includes cases that were verified during the period 2017–2019 that had occurred prior to 2017.

children were arrested with little or no evidence, and some remained detained for periods ranging from one week to eight years.

24. The country task force verified the detention by the Nigerian Security Forces of 275 children (260 boys, 15 girls), aged between 10 and 17 years, for actual or alleged association with armed groups. Almost all of the children were released from detention during the reporting period, with only three boys still detained at the time of reporting.

25. Of the 272 children released by the Nigerian Security Forces, 230 (215 boys, 15 girls) were released from the Giwa military barracks and from Maiduguri Maximum Security Prison in 2020. The children had mostly been detained after escaping from captivity by armed groups and surrendering to the Security Forces at the nearest town or village from their point of escape. A further 42 boys were released from military detention in 2021, following advocacy by the country task force.

26. Some children had initially been held by the Nigerian Security Forces in local prisons or detention facilities for short periods. Eventually, most of the children were transferred to the Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri, the main military detention facility in Borno State. According to first-hand testimonies from more than 200 children interviewed by the country task force, the conditions of detention at the Giwa barracks were of great concern. Although the facility has a cell block designated exclusively for minors, children were often held in cells with adult inmates, where food and water were scarcer and conditions even more crowded. Children detained described squalid and severely overcrowded holding cells, which were extremely hot and made it difficult, if not impossible, to sleep at night. The children also stated that, during their stay in detention, they were interviewed by officials of the Department of State Services to determine their level of association with armed groups. None of the children had contact with family members outside the detention centre. Children also reported that their families were not notified by authorities of their arrest or detention.

27. Once released, all the children were systematically handed over to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, which received them at the Bulumkutu transit centre in Maiduguri. Although the notice given prior to the release of children was usually short (a few days), that notice is considered a good practice, as it affords the Ministry, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations the opportunity to provide interim care and community-based reintegration services.

28. The country task force was unable to determine the overall number of children still in detention for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, as access to detention facilities continued to be denied by authorities.

B. Killing and maiming of children

29. The country task force verified the killing and maiming of 212 children (136 boys, 73 girls, 3 sex unknown), aged between 9 and 17 years, in north-east Nigeria. The violations were attributed to ISWAP (87), JAS (51), unidentified perpetrators (46) and the Nigerian Security Forces (28). Seven additional reported cases of children killed (4) and maimed (3) could not be verified at the time of reporting.

30. A decrease was observed compared with the previous reporting period, when 1,433 child casualties were verified. A downward trend was also observed within the current period, with 124 casualties verified in 2020 and 88 in 2021. This may be due to several factors, including the loss of territory initially under the control of JAS and ISWAP, the mass surrender of JAS elements, associates and family members in 2021 and the continued lack of access to some areas in north-east Nigeria to verify

violations. The number of children killed and maimed in suicide attacks also decreased compared with the previous reporting period.

31. Despite that decrease, the security situation remained extremely volatile in north-east Nigeria. Attacks and threats attributed to ISWAP increased from 30 in 2020 to 57 in 2021 and were more prevalent than those attributed to JAS during 2021. ISWAP carried out direct attacks on civilians and expressed hostility towards humanitarian workers, including through articles in the media.

32. Gunshots during crossfire were the leading cause of child casualties, representing 90 per cent (189) of the total, while 17 children were killed or maimed by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, and 6 children were casualties of suicide attacks. In one verified incident, an ISWAP artillery attack on parts of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, on 23 February 2021, resulted in the killing of 8 children (4 boys, 4 girls) and the maiming of 21 children (12 boys, 9 girls). In another verified incident, in August 2020, ISWAP elements attacked and killed two boys foraging for firewood on the outskirts of a town in the Ngala Local Government Area, Borno State.

33. The 28 child casualties attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces involved mainly airstrikes and gunshots during responses to offensives by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups. For example, in April 2020, a Nigerian Air Force airstrike on a village in the Damboa Local Government Area, Borno State, resulted in the killing and maiming of 19 children (7 boys, 12 girls). In another instance, in December 2021, the country task force verified the killing of two girls, aged 15 and 17 years, following their rape by soldiers of the Nigerian Security Forces brigade in the Dikwa Local Government Area, Borno State.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

34. Girls continued to be extremely vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and forced marriage. Forced and child marriage have been used by families as negative coping mechanisms to alleviate economic desperation and to deter armed groups from abducting unmarried girls.

35. The country task force verified sexual violence committed against 63 girls, aged between 6 and 17 years. All the violations occurred in Borno State and were attributed to JAS (53), ISWAP (6), the Nigerian Security Forces (3) and CJTF (1). Of the total, 10 girls were verified as being survivors of sexual violence in 2020, and 53 in 2021.

36. JAS and ISWAP were the main perpetrators of verified incidents of sexual violence, which often occurred in the context of other grave violations, such as abduction or recruitment and use. A total of 42 girls were forcefully married to JAS and ISWAP fighters after their abduction. For example, seven girls between the ages of 12 and 17, abducted by JAS in the Bama Local Government Area, between January 2018 and January 2021, were forcefully married to JAS combatants. The girls reported being held in the Sambisa forest before they escaped and reached Nigerian Security Forces positions. Similarly, six girls between the ages of 14 and 17 were forcefully married to ISWAP fighters after being abducted in January 2020 in the Ngala Local Government Area. They escaped and approached the Nigerian Security Forces and were handed over to civilian child protection agencies.

37. There was a decrease compared with the previous reporting period, when the country task force verified incidents of sexual violence against 204 children. However, an escalation was observed within the reporting period, with 10 violations verified in 2020 and 53 in 2021. As in the previous report, it was challenging to document and verify sexual violence cases, owing to the survivors' fear of stigma and

the lack of access by the country task force to some conflict-affected areas. The numbers therefore do not capture the prevalence of cases of sexual violence against children that may have occurred in north-east Nigeria, but serve to illustrate the severity of the problem.

38. The three verified cases of sexual violence attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces occurred in 2021. For instance, in December 2021, a Nigerian Security Forces soldier in Dikwa enticed a 17-year-old girl with food and raped her. The case attributed to CJTF involved the rape of a 14 year-old girl by a CJTF element in the Damboa Local Government Area in June 2020. The attacker fled the location before he could be arrested by the relevant authorities.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

39. In north-east Nigeria, 30 attacks on schools (9) and hospitals (21) were verified and attributed to ISWAP (18), JAS (11) and unidentified perpetrators (1). Most incidents occurred in Borno and Yobe States. Hostilities and violence perpetrated by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups continued to severely affect children's access to education and health care, in particular in Yobe and Borno States. Of concern was the targeting by armed groups of schools and health and humanitarian facilities, leading to a spike in out-of-school children. UNICEF estimated that, by the end of the reporting period, at least 10.5 million children, or one third of Nigerian children, were out of school in Nigeria.

40. Attacks on schools occurred in 2020 (5) and in 2021 (4) and involved the burning and destruction of infrastructure and equipment. For instance, in April 2020, JAS attacked Buni Gari village in the Gujba Local Government Area, Yobe State, and burned down the central primary school, affecting the education of about 800 pupils estimated to be enrolled in the school. In another verified incident, on 16 April 2021, ISWAP attacked the Kafela government secondary school for girls in Geidam Local Government Area, Yobe State, setting fire to two classrooms.

41. The country task force verified the military use of six schools by the Nigerian Security Forces in six locations in Borno State. The schools continued to be used at the time of reporting. The country task force and partners conducted advocacy for the schools to be vacated.

42. Attacks on hospitals took place in 2020 (10) and in 2021 (11) and involved the burning and destruction of infrastructure and equipment, as well as the looting of drugs and medical supplies. For instance, in August 2020, ISWAP operatives broke into the Kareram health clinic in Magumeri Local Government Area, looting drugs and vaccines and destroying medical equipment. About 300 women and children benefited from the clinic. In another verified incident that occurred on 17 and 18 August 2020, ISWAP burned down the general hospital in Magumeri Local Government Area. The facility, which suffered extensive damage to its medical equipment and a collapsed roof, was the only hospital in the area, serving close to 140,000 civilians.

E. Abduction

43. The country task force verified the abduction of 287 children (142 boys, 145 girls), aged between 3 and 17 years, by JAS (164) and ISWAP (123). While there has been a decreasing trend compared with the previous report, when the abduction of 413 children was verified, an upward trend was observed during the reporting period, with 76 children verified as abducted in 2020 and 211 in 2021. This recent

trend may be explained by the intent of ISWAP to boost its ranks in the light of the mass surrender of JAS and by continued attacks from the Nigerian Security Forces against armed groups. Furthermore, the number of children abducted by JAS and ISWAP is believed to be significantly higher, as monitoring was hampered by access and security constraints.

44. Of the 287 children verified as having been abducted during the reporting period, 56 of them (12 boys, 44 girls) were abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use, including 42 girls who were also sexually abused during their association with the armed groups. The purpose of abducting the other children was unknown. A total of 125 children were released or escaped during the reporting period, 53 children were apprehended by the Nigerian Security Forces and the whereabouts of the other children remained unknown as at the time of reporting.

45. The abduction of girls for the purpose of forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence remained of serious concern. Most of the children were forcibly taken away from their homes, schools and communities to be sexually enslaved, forcibly married and used in supporting roles. For example, on 31 March 2021, ISWAP abducted 15 girls, aged between 9 and 17 years, in Borno State, while they were searching for firewood outside the internally displaced persons camps where they lived. As at the time of reporting, the whereabouts of the 15 girls were unknown. In another verified incident, in October 2021, 69 boys, aged between 13 and 17 years, were abducted by ISWAP in one mass abduction incident. All 69 boys were released two days later, and the reason for their abduction remained unknown.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

46. A total of 32 incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children were verified during the reporting period: 18 in 2020 and 14 in 2021. ISWAP was the main perpetrator, responsible for 24 incidents, followed by JAS (5), unidentified perpetrators (2) and the Nigerian Security Forces (1). The incidents occurred in Borno (29) and Yobe (3) States. They involved attacks on humanitarian facilities and personnel (15), the abduction of humanitarian workers (8), the removal or blocking of humanitarian supplies (3) and the disruption and looting of humanitarian supplies (3). The incident attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces involved interference in humanitarian operations.

47. Those incidents often resulted in the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities and affected the delivery of humanitarian aid to thousands of children. In addition, increased hostility towards humanitarian workers was observed during the reporting period. For example, in April 2021, ISWAP attacked a town in Borno State. They burned down an international non-governmental organization compound, a humanitarian warehouse and two vehicles belonging to a humanitarian organization and stole an ambulance from the hospital. Although there were no casualties, the incident led to the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities and the evacuation of humanitarian staff. In another verified instance, on 13 June 2020, ISWAP attacked the humanitarian hub in the Monguno Local Government Area, Borno State, burning three vehicles belonging to humanitarian organizations. An aid worker sustained a gunshot injury.

48. During 2021, ISWAP carried out attacks that caused civilian casualties; they also expressed hostility towards humanitarian workers, including through articles in the media. In 2021, attacks caused casualties among humanitarian workers and disrupted humanitarian operations. For example, in March 2021, ISWAP carried out an attack in the Dikwa Local Government Area, in which the humanitarian hub, including aid workers their offices and guest houses, were targeted.

IV. Advocacy and dialogue with parties to conflict

49. The country task force continued to engage with the relevant ministers of the Federal Government of Nigeria to advocate the endorsement and signing of a handover protocol to facilitate the release of children allegedly associated with armed groups and their handover to civilian child protection actors. The Federal Ministry of Justice, through its Directorate for Legal Services in the International Cooperative Department, vetted and provided a legal opinion on and approval of the handover protocol. As at the time of reporting, the handover protocol was pending signature by the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Women's Affairs and Social Development and the National Security Adviser. Furthermore, the country task force continued to engage with relevant government entities to advocate in favour of unimpeded access to detention facilities where children actually or allegedly associated with armed groups were being held.

50. CJTF continued to implement its 2017 action plan addressing child recruitment and use. In 2020, a three-day workshop was held with more than 70 participants, bringing together CJTF commanders operating in 25 local government areas in Borno State, representatives of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State and representatives of United Nations agencies. The primary point of discussion was to review the action plan activities remaining to be implemented. Key outcomes included proposed actions such as the establishment of a responsive child protection unit in all CJTF formations and the institution of accountability mechanisms subjecting CJTF members to disciplinary measures when they bridge provisions of their standing orders that are in line with the action plan.

51. Following the delisting of CJTF from the annex to the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), CJTF and the country task force continued to work together to reinforce zero tolerance on the recruitment and use of children by CJTF and to monitor the implementation of the remaining activities of the action plan, while consolidating the gains made. A total of 24 child protection units were established in all CJTF formations in Borno State. Furthermore, CJTF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice of Borno State, aired radio programmes to raise awareness on grave violations against children, with a focus on zero tolerance for the recruitment and use of children. The programmes targeted mainly members of CJTF and the communities. Community members have fully participated in the programmes, with some sharing their experience, expressing appreciation for the programmes and expressing their commitment to preventing child recruitment and use. Action plan activities that remain to be implemented include the training of all CJTF units on children's rights and the establishment of the above-mentioned accountability mechanisms.

52. In December 2021, the government of Borno State and its House of Assembly passed a bill on child rights, which was signed into law as the Child Rights Act by the Governor on 10 January 2022. That represents a major step forward for the protection of the rights of conflict-affected children in north-east Nigeria. Despite this important achievement, little progress was observed during the reporting period in terms of accountability for perpetrators of grave violations against children in Nigeria. In 2020, a military court sentenced a corporal to five years' imprisonment for the rape and attempted murder of a displaced girl in Bama town, Borno State. Furthermore, the Government's special investigations panel on sexual and gender-based violence documented 210 cases of conflict-related sexual violence committed in 2020, including rape and forced marriage, affecting 94 girls and 30 boys, among others, noting that such crimes continued to be chronically underreported owing to stigma and harmful social norms.

53. On 21 April 2021, during a forum entitled “Financing Safe Schools: Creating Safe Learning Communities”, representatives of federal ministries of the Government of Nigeria and state governments and all state education commissioners, as well as representatives of security agencies, multilateral institutions and international donors, committed themselves to developing and implementing the Abuja compact on financing for safe schools, to create safe learning communities in order to redress the education emergency Nigeria is facing, so that children can safely return to school.

54. Between 25 and 27 October 2021, the fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration was held in Abuja. The conference was hosted by Nigeria, in collaboration with Argentina, Norway, Spain, the African Union Commission and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. With the participation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, it brought together high-level representatives of Governments, international organizations and civil society to promote global cooperation and strengthen coordination on implementing the Safe Schools Declaration. The theme of the conference was “Ensuring safe education for all: from commitment to practice”. The Conference was aimed at sharing good practices, encouraging global cooperation and coordination and identifying actions that Governments can take to promote accountability for attacks on education.

V. Release of children and programmatic response

55. Through the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, the United Nations and child protection partners supported the reintegration of 6,503 children (3,752 boys, 2,751 girls) formerly associated with armed groups, including children released during previous reporting periods. All children were provided with reintegration support by UNICEF implementing partners, including for the development of microenterprise and business start-up skills, in order to assist with the start of livelihood activities. Younger children were enrolled in school.

VI. Observations and recommendations

56. I remain seriously concerned about the continued grave violations committed against children by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, notably JAS and ISWAP. I urge Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups to immediately end and prevent all violations against children, release all children associated with them and abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

57. I strongly condemn the abduction of children, many of whom were girls, by JAS and ISWAP, notably for the purpose of recruitment and use and sexual violence. I urge these groups to immediately release all abducted children.

58. I remain gravely concerned about ongoing attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and hospitals, as well as the denial of humanitarian access to children, including through attacks against humanitarian workers. I call upon all parties to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals and to allow safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors to conflict-affected populations.

59. I welcome the signing into law by the Borno State government of the Child Rights Act, which will provide a reinforced framework for the protection of conflict-affected children in the state.

60. I commend both the Government of Nigeria and CJTF for the constructive role that they have played in the implementation of the 2017 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by CJTF. I further welcome the establishment of child protection units in all CJTF formations in Borno State and the roll-out of awareness-raising activities among CJTF and community members, in line with the action plan. I urge CJTF, with the continued support of the United Nations, to complete its remaining obligations under the action plan, namely, the training of its units on children's rights and the establishment of accountability mechanisms subjecting CJTF members to disciplinary measures when standing orders that are in line with the action plan are violated.

61. I note the release by the Nigerian authorities of 272 children from detention. I remain concerned about children still being held in detention for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, about the conditions and prolonged periods of detention and about the fact that the United Nations continued to be denied access to detention facilities. I call upon the Nigerian authorities to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims and for detention to be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period, with the best interests of the child and international standards for juvenile justice as guiding principles. I encourage the Government to continue to coordinate with relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations, before the release of detained children, allowing adequate time for the preparation of the programmatic response. I also call upon the Government to provide unhindered access to child protection actors to detention facilities, in particular the Giwa military barracks.

62. I welcome the further steps that were taken towards the endorsement by national authorities of a protocol for the handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors, and I call upon the Government to expedite its endorsement and implementation.

63. I welcome the efforts of the Government of Nigeria, with the support of the United Nations and partners, leading to the reintegration of 6,503 children formerly associated with armed groups. I encourage the Nigerian authorities to continue to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive reintegration of all children released, as well as the provision of educational, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict. I further urge the Government to pay particular attention to the risks of the re-recruitment of children, in particular in the light of the large number of individuals, including children, escaping from JAS.

64. I urge the Government to swiftly endorse the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.

65. I appeal to the Government to pursue its efforts to promote accountability by investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for grave violations against children and to ensure that all victims have access to justice and are provided with comprehensive, age-appropriate and gender-sensitive protection services.

66. I welcome the contributions of donors to the United Nations, civil society organizations and the Government of Nigeria to support humanitarian and development programmes, especially those that help children affected by conflict and that facilitate access to education and health services. I urge donors to enhance their financial support for these programmes, in particular for the interim care, long-term psychosocial recovery and community-based social and economic reintegration of children who have been abducted, recruited and used and girls who are survivors of sexual violence.