



# Security Council

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## Children and armed conflict in South Sudan

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in South Sudan and covers the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in South Sudan, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations against children, namely the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals,<sup>1</sup> the abduction of children and denial of humanitarian access. Where available, the report contains information on perpetrators. It also outlines information on the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through dialogue with parties.

The report provides a series of recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in South Sudan.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the present report, the phrase “protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals”, used in Security Council resolutions [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), as well as in the statements by the President of the Security Council of 17 June 2013 ([S/PRST/2013/8](#)) and 31 October 2017 ([S/PRST/2017/21](#)), refers to teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.



## I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, covers the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022. It is the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in South Sudan to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report highlights trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in South Sudan and provides details of the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2020/1205](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in South Sudan ([S/AC.51/2021/1](#)). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the dialogue with parties to the conflict. Where possible, violations are attributed to parties to the conflict. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/76/871-S/2022/493](#)), under the list of parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) remained listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and abduction of children. In the same report, SSPDF was delisted for the violation of attacks on schools and hospitals. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition – pro Machar (SPLM/A-IO) remained listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and abduction of children.

2. The information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in South Sudan, which is co-chaired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Insecurity and access challenges to conflict-affected areas hampered the documentation and verification of grave violations against children in some parts of the country. The continuation of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and related response measures, including restrictions on movement, further exacerbated these challenges. Therefore, the information contained in the report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in South Sudan during the reporting period, and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher. Where incidents were committed earlier but verified only during the reporting period, such information is qualified as relating to an incident that was late-verified.

## II. Overview of political and security developments

3. The period under review was marked by significant political, security and humanitarian developments in South Sudan.

4. The parties to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan made progress on its implementation and on the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity.

5. National and state-level governance structures continued to be formed and, between October 2020 and March 2021, parties to the Revitalized Agreement agreed on the allocation of all 79 counties in accordance with the responsibility-sharing ratio set out in the peace agreement. In February and March 2021, the President, Salva Kiir, issued several decrees appointing ministers, advisers, commissioners and chairpersons of independent commissions at the state level, and delegated powers to state governors. However, the appointments fell short of the stipulation in the Agreement that women should make up 35 per cent of the appointees.

6. In May 2021, Mr. Kiir dissolved the Transitional National Legislative Assembly and the Council of States and reconstituted a 550-member parliament. The parliament was subsequently sworn in on 4 August, and the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly and a new 92-member Council of States were inaugurated on 30 August 2021. In March 2022, the formation of the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly was completed.

7. Several rounds of peace talks brokered by the Community of Sant'Egidio were held during the reporting period, on the integration of non-signatory parties to the Revitalized Agreement under the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance into transitional security arrangements.

8. On 29 January 2021, the Government announced that the Cabinet had instructed the Ministry of Justice to take steps to establish the transitional justice mechanisms provided for in the Revitalized Agreement. Progress on the establishment of the Hybrid Court and the Compensation and Reparation Authority, two of the three transitional justice mechanisms foreseen in the Agreement, remained pending at the time of reporting. In April 2022, Mr. Kiir launched public consultations for the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing. He emphasized that South Sudan needed reconciliation before pursuing punitive justice and called for inclusive consultations towards genuine reconciliation. Overall, accountability for serious human rights violations and abuses remained low.

9. The formation of the necessary unified forces remained a contentious issue for the implementation of the peace agreement. On 30 September 2020, the Joint Transitional Security Committee reported the completion of some key requirements and the establishment of 17 training centres for the necessary unified forces. Since then, the forces have undergone military training, and the Joint Defence Board conducted several screening exercises in preparation for their formation. On 3 April 2022, Mr. Kiir formed the unified command structure for the necessary unified forces, ending one of the longest impasses relating to the security arrangements of the Revitalized Agreement. While military personnel have since been appointed to the structure, the graduation of the necessary unified forces remains pending, which has created a security vacuum.

10. The reporting period was also marked by further fragmentation of the parties to the conflict and notable splintering of and defections between armed forces and groups. This threatened trust among the parties and undermined the implementation of the peace agreement. For instance, on 9 September 2020, Lieutenant General Nicodemus Deng Deng Aliir, the former Chief of General Staff of the National Democratic Movement, defected to SSPDF. In another instance, on 3 May 2021, Major General Stephen Buay Rolnyang, formerly of SSPDF, joined the South Sudan United Front/Army under General Malong, citing poor treatment, corruption and tribalism as reasons for his defection.

11. Of particular concern was the fragmentation of SPLM/A-IO. On 26 September 2020, SPLM/A-IO announced the defection of Major General Moses Lokujo, an influential leader in the greater Yei area, to SSPDF. Several other defections followed. On 3 August 2021, a group of SPLM/A-IO military leaders announced, through the Kitgwang Declaration, that they had ousted the First Vice-President, Riek Machar, as Chairperson and Commander-in-Chief of SPLM/A-IO and had replaced him with Gatwech Dual. The SPLM/A-IO Political Bureau rejected the Declaration and cancelled the group's membership, marking the establishment of the SPLM/A-IO Kitgwang faction, which subsequently engaged in violent clashes with SPLM/A-IO. This created a fragile security environment for civilians, including children, with an increase in grave violations verified.

12. The security situation across South Sudan remained fragile and was marked by continuing low-intensity clashes between armed forces and armed groups and pockets of subnational violence, putting children at high risk for grave violations. In Unity State, from June to August 2020, clashes occurred between SPLA-IO and organized armed youths. In Equatoria, the National Salvation Front remained active and clashed with SSPDF and SPLA-IO repeatedly throughout the reporting period, in at least eight instances in March and April 2021 alone. Violence at the subnational level continued unabated, with complex underlying causes and along ethnic lines. Between September and November 2020, attacks and revenge attacks between Murle and Jie communities occurred in Jonglei State, while in Unity State local armed youth groups aligned with SSPDF caused strife and committed grave violations against children. In June and August 2021, the resurgence of inter-ethnic tensions between the Balanda and Azande communities in Western Equatoria State led to clashes that resulted in scores of casualties and the destruction of homes. The continued negative impact of the violence on civilian populations led UNMISS to establish a temporary operating base in Tambura. In April 2022, a series of deadly attacks on villages in Unity State was perpetrated by armed youths affiliated with SSPDF. Civilians and SPLA-IO commanders alleged that the motive for the attacks was to force civilians, who were perceived as SPLA-IO supporters, to support the Government and relocate to government-controlled areas.

13. The overall human rights situation in South Sudan remained fragile, with continued reports of attacks against civilians, including a sharp increase in conflict-related sexual violence in the first half of 2022.

14. Humanitarian needs grew further owing to the dire economic situation characterized by inflationary pressure and a further depreciation of the South Sudanese pound, disrupted livelihoods, food insecurity, climatic shocks, including floods and droughts, conflict and prolonged mass displacement. In June 2022, 143,986 children were treated for severe wasting, an increase of 27.8 per cent compared with the same month in 2021. In 2022, over 1.34 million children in South Sudan faced acute malnutrition and required life-saving treatment for survival; 1.4 million people, of whom over 50 per cent were children, were internally displaced; and an estimated 8.9 million people – more than two thirds of the South Sudanese population – had significant humanitarian needs. The South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan, launched on 31 March 2022, was only 28 per cent funded at the time of reporting.

15. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a negative impact on the population, exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation and placed additional strain on the weak health-care system. Pandemic response and mitigation measures created limitations for the implementation of the peace agreement and of child protection activities and the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children.

### **III. Update on the main actors involved in the armed conflict in South Sudan**

16. The integration of SPLA-IO and South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) forces into SSPDF, including the cantonment process, as foreseen in the transitional security arrangements of the Revitalized Agreement, continued throughout the reporting period, albeit at a slow pace. The formation of the unified command structure for the necessary unified forces in April 2022 marked a significant development in that regard.

17. Armed groups remained active in several parts of the country, causing a volatile security environment marked by recurring attacks on civilian populations and the destruction of property. Clashes among armed groups or between armed groups and government security forces resulted in grave violations against children and had an adverse impact on the work of humanitarian actors on the ground.

18. Throughout the reporting period, armed groups splintered and disintegrated, which often resulted in localized fighting. For example, following the defection of General Lokujo from SPLA-IO to SSPDF, forces loyal to him clashed with SPLA-IO in September 2020 and on several other occasions. In March 2021, the European Union sanctioned General Lokujo over serious human rights violations in South Sudan.

19. Similarly, tensions arose between SPLA-IO and the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction following the split of General Dual and Johnson Olony from SPLA-IO, resulting in the formation of the new faction. For instance, on 7 August 2021, SPLA-IO and SPLA-IO Kitgwang forces clashed in Upper Nile State. Tensions escalated further in the first quarter of 2022.

20. Since the issuance of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, the Taban Deng-allied South Sudan People's Defence Forces were integrated into SSPDF and ceased to engage independently in armed conflict.

21. In Central Equatoria and Western Equatoria, the National Salvation Front under General Thomas Cirillo remained active and engaged in fighting with SSPDF and SPLA-IO on several occasions. Some reported allegations of grave violations against children committed by the Front could not be verified owing to security concerns and resulting access constraints.

22. In Western Equatoria State, forces loyal to General James Nando remained active throughout the reporting period.

23. In Unity State, the National People's Alliance Movement (NPAM), led by General Ruai Kuol Jal, resurfaced in the first quarter of 2022.

#### **IV. Grave violations against children**

24. The country task force verified 457 grave violations against 409 children (287 boys, 114 girls and 8 of unknown sex). Of these, 60 violations occurred between 1 July and 31 December 2020, 168 in 2021 and 183 between 1 January and 30 June 2022. The remaining 46 violations occurred in earlier periods and lasted until the reporting period. A spike in violations was verified between July 2021 and June 2022, due partly to prevailing pockets of armed conflict resulting from defections and the splintering of parties to the conflict<sup>2</sup> and partly to improved conditions for monitoring and reporting on grave violations enabled by the formation of the necessary unified forces.

25. A total of 23 children (3 boys and 20 girls) were affected by multiple violations, including 16 girls who were abducted and raped, 2 girls who were raped and killed and 3 boys who were abducted and recruited and used. Two girls were subjected to three violations each, namely abduction, recruitment and use, and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

<sup>2</sup> See the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in South Sudan issued during the reporting period, namely [S/2020/890](#), [S/2020/1180](#), [S/2021/172](#), [S/2021/566](#), [S/2021/784](#), [S/2021/1015](#), [S/2022/156](#), [S/2022/468](#) and [S/2022/689](#).

26. In addition, the country task force late-verified 11 grave violations against 11 children (2 boys and 9 girls) that occurred prior to the reporting period, including the maiming of 2 boys, rape and other forms of sexual violence against 5 girls and the abduction of 4 girls.

27. Over 35 per cent of the violations were attributed to government security forces (167), namely SSPDF (153), the South Sudan National Police Service (13) and the South Sudan National Wildlife Service (1). Some 196 violations, nearly 45 per cent of the total, were perpetrated by armed groups, namely SPLA-IO (79), the National Salvation Front (28), forces loyal to General Nando (27), forces loyal to General Lokujo (26), the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (18), NPAM (12) and SSOA (6). A total of 21 violations remained unattributed as they were committed by unidentified perpetrators (11) or resulted from crossfire incidents (10). Explosive remnants of war, which remained the leading cause of killing and maiming of children, were responsible for 69 child casualties.

28. Violations were verified in Unity (144), Central Equatoria (84), Western Equatoria (76), Lakes (39), Upper Nile (35), Western Bahr el-Ghazal (26), Jonglei (25), Northern Bahr el-Ghazal (15), Eastern Equatoria (5) and Warrap (4).

29. The recruitment and use of children (182) was the most verified grave violation, accounting for 39 per cent of the total, followed by killing and maiming (117) at 25 per cent and rape and other forms of sexual violence (74) at 17 per cent. Attacks on schools and hospitals (11) decreased by 50 per cent compared with the previous reporting period (22).

#### **A. Recruitment and use**

30. The recruitment and use of 182 children (174 boys and 8 girls) was verified. Of these, 18 children were recruited in 2018 and 17 in 2019 and remained in use during the reporting period, while 5 were recruited and used in the second half of 2020, 101 in 2021 and 30 in the first half of 2022. The period of recruitment for 11 children was unknown. The children were between 9 and 17 years old, with at least 17 children below the age of 15 years.

31. SPLA-IO and SSPDF were the two top perpetrators of recruitment and use of children. Of the 182 violations, 117 were attributed to non-State actors, including SPLA-IO (55), forces loyal to General Nando (27), forces loyal to General Lokujo (26), SSOA (6), the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (2) and the National Salvation Front (1). Some 65 boys were recruited and used by government security forces, namely by SSPDF (51), the South Sudan National Police Service (13) and the South Sudan National Wildlife Service (1).

32. Violations occurred in Western Equatoria (56), Central Equatoria (38), Upper Nile (27), Lakes (21), Western Bahr el-Ghazal (18), Unity (11), Jonglei (10) and Warrap (1).

33. Children were used as bodyguards, porters, cooks and messengers. Some were observed participating in military parades or performing security duties. For example, in July 2021, three armed and uniformed boys aged between 15 and 17 years were observed serving as bodyguards to an SSPDF general in Jonglei State. The children were part of a team of soldiers deployed to provide security and prevent road ambushes. In September 2021, 15 boys and 1 girl aged between 15 and 17 years were observed taking part in a military parade of forces loyal to General Nando in Western Equatoria.

34. Children were often recruited from their homes and villages. For example, in April 2022, 13 boys aged between 12 and 16 years were recruited by SPLA-IO from

villages in Western Equatoria. They were later intercepted at an SSPDF checkpoint. The perpetrators were arrested, tried in a court of law and convicted to prison sentences and financial penalties.

35. The formation of the necessary unified forces provided the country task force with opportunities to access military barracks and cantonment sites in order to conduct screening and age verification exercises, verify grave violations and advocate for the protection of children. Partially owing to this, the verification of more than half of the cases of recruitment and use took place in 2021. About one third of all recruited and used children (52) were identified while undergoing military training at cantonment sites and training centres. For example, in July 2020, the country task force verified the recruitment and use of 14 boys aged between 14 and 17 years by SPLA-IO at a training centre for necessary unified forces in Upper Nile. Eight of the children were subsequently released. In October 2021, the country task force, during a monitoring exercise, verified the recruitment and use of 18 boys aged between 13 and 17 years by SSPDF in Lakes State. Seven of the boys were formally released a month later, while the status of the remaining children is unknown. Children were also verified as recruited and used during screening exercises, including joint exercises with the Joint Defence Board in, for example, Western Bahr el-Ghazal, ahead of the graduation of unified forces and during visits to unified training centres.

36. In total, 18 children were formally released and 11 escaped during the reporting period. The country task force continued to engage with armed forces and armed groups and with national- and state-level technical committees on the implementation of the 2020 Comprehensive Action Plan to End and Prevent all Grave Violations against Children.

#### **Deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with armed forces or armed groups**

37. Cases of children deprived of their liberty for their actual or alleged association with armed forces or armed groups were not verified during the reporting period.

## **B. Killing and maiming**

38. The killing (58) and maiming (59) of 117 children (91 boys, 25 girls and 1 of unknown sex) was verified. Of these, 24 child casualties occurred between July and December 2020, 37 in 2021 and 56 in the first half of 2022. The children were between 2 and 17 years old.

39. The violations were attributed to SSPDF (29), the National Salvation Front (5), SPLA-IO (3) and the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (1). Ten children were maimed during crossfire between SSPDF and armed youths (3), SPLA-IO and armed youths (2), SSPDF and the National Salvation Front (2), SSPDF and SPLA-IO (1), SPLA-IO and forces loyal to General Nando (1) and SPLA-IO and the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (1). The killing and maiming of 69 children remained unattributed as it was caused by explosive remnants of war. Most children were killed and maimed in Unity State (36), predominantly owing to attacks on villages and during crossfire between armed forces and groups. The remaining violations occurred in Central Equatoria (19), Lakes (16), Northern Bahr el-Ghazal (15), Jonglei (12), Upper Nile (7), Eastern Equatoria (5), Western Equatoria (4) and Warrap (3).

40. The maiming of two boys by explosive remnants of war in Western Bahr el-Ghazal and Unity occurred prior to the reporting period and was late-verified.

41. The causes of child casualties included explosive remnants of war (69), crossfire incidents (10), sexual violence (2) and the use of small arms and light weapons.

42. For example, in May 2021, the country task force verified the killing of a 12-year-old girl owing to crossfire during fighting between SSPDF and the National Salvation Front in Western Equatoria. The girl was killed when National Salvation Front forces attacked SSPDF barracks, an incident that also claimed two adult lives. In another instance, in September 2021, the maiming of a 14-year-old boy by a firearm was verified in Western Equatoria. The child was injured when fighting broke out between forces loyal to General Nando and an armed group affiliated with SPLA-IO forces in Tambura. Violence in Unity State in April 2022 had a particularly grim impact on children. On 8 and 9 April, 24 children (21 boys and 3 girls) aged between 12 and 15 years were killed by armed youths affiliated with SSPDF. The children died when the forces attacked several villages in Leer County, Unity. Some children were shot dead, while others were burned in their homes. Two girls died because of injuries inflicted on them during sexual violence. The perpetrators had received access and logistical support from local officials and SSPDF.

43. Explosive remnants of war continued to be the leading cause of child casualties and were responsible for almost 60 per cent of all cases of killing and maiming. For instance, in November 2020, 13 boys aged between 12 and 15 years were killed (4) and maimed (9) when an explosive device detonated in Yirol East County, Lakes State. The children had lit a bonfire to keep themselves warm but unknowingly did so on top of a cluster munition. The resulting uncontrolled explosion killed three of the children immediately. Another child died en route to a hospital. The remaining nine children were admitted to a nearby health facility with various injuries. In another incident, in July 2021, five girls aged between 5 and 10 years were maimed by a hand grenade in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. The children had picked up the explosive device near the riverside where soldiers had previously been stationed. When they started playing with it, the device exploded. They received medical attention at a nearby health facility. The country task force continued to work and engage with the Mine Action Service on demining efforts to ensure safe environments for children.

### **C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence**

44. The country task force verified rape and other forms of sexual violence against 74 girls, namely 7 cases in the second half of 2020, 7 in 2021 and 60 in the first half of 2022. The children were aged between 9 and 17 years.

45. Most of the violations were attributed to SSPDF (57). The remaining cases were perpetrated by SPLA-IO (8), the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (8) and the National Salvation Front (1).

46. The violations took place in Unity (60), Central Equatoria (8), Western Equatoria (5) and Western Bahr el-Ghazal (1).

47. The cases verified were rape (64), gang rape (9) and attempted rape (1).

48. A total of 69 survivors received medical and psychosocial support. Overall, the availability of comprehensive, survivor-centred assistance for child survivors of sexual violence remained inadequate.

49. In addition, five violations against five girls that occurred prior to the reporting period were late-verified. They were attributed to SPLA-IO (4) in Unity State and SSPDF (1) in Upper Nile State.

50. More than 80 per cent of the violations occurred in Unity State during attacks on villages by armed youths affiliated with SSPDF and offences by SPLA-IO and the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction. The attacks by armed youths in Unity in April 2022



resulted in the rape of 51 girls aged between 11 and 17 years. Two of the victims died from injuries resulting from the sexual violence.

51. Girls were often targeted during military offences and attacks on villages. For example, in November 2020, three girls aged between 12 and 15 years were raped by SPLA-IO soldiers in Central Equatoria during military clashes between SPLA-IO and forces loyal to General Lokujo. In September 2021, a 12-year-old girl was raped in her home by a National Salvation Front soldier during a raid on her village and the looting of a refugee camp.

52. In other instances, girls were targeted on roads and while performing daily activities. In April 2022, an 11-year-old girl in Western Equatoria was ambushed on her way home from a maize mill, dragged into the bush and raped at gunpoint by an SSPDF soldier.

53. In some instances, girls were also abducted prior to being subjected to sexual violence. For example, in July 2020 SPLA-IO soldiers in Unity State abducted four girls aged between 13 and 16 years from their villages and raped them repeatedly while holding them in captivity for three days. The girls were subsequently released. In February 2022, armed youths affiliated with the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction in Unity State abducted two 15-year-old girls, took them to a military barracks and raped them.

54. Gang rape remained a concern in South Sudan. In August 2020, eight SPLA-IO soldiers attacked and looted the home of a family in Western Equatoria and held residing family members at gunpoint, while two of the soldiers took turns raping a 16-year-old girl.

55. The high prevalence of gender-based violence, rooted in gender inequality, power imbalances and the marginalization of women and girls and compounded by the dire humanitarian, security and economic situation, continued to affect children in South Sudan.

56. Accountability for sexual violence in South Sudan remained very low. Overall, the situation in South Sudan remained characterized by significant limitations of the rule of law and a culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence. The country task force continued to engage with the authorities to support the strengthening of accountability mechanisms. The launch of mobile courts and district court martials in several parts of the country by the Government, with the support of UNMISS and United Nations agencies, was a positive development in that regard.

57. Sexual violence is a violation that often remains underreported owing to stigmatization, the risk of reprisals, a lack of accountability and the absence of adequate support services for survivors. Survivors often experience blame and alienation from their community after enduring sexual violence, especially if they become pregnant as a result.

#### **D. Attacks on schools and hospitals**

58. The country task force verified 11 attacks on schools (3) and hospitals (8). Of these, four incidents occurred in the second half of 2020, four in 2021 and three in the first half of 2022.

59. The violations were attributed to SSPDF (3), the National Salvation Front (3), SPLA-IO (2) and unidentified perpetrators (3).

60. The attacks occurred in Central Equatoria (3), Unity (2), Western Equatoria (2), Jonglei (1), Lakes (1), Upper Nile (1) and Western Bahr el-Ghazal (1).

61. Attacks on schools and hospitals included looting, attacks on medical and educational personnel, carjacking and incidents of break-in and theft.

62. Most of the schools and hospitals were attacked for the purpose of looting, including as a result of the dire conditions marked by a lack of food and other necessities in cantonment sites.

63. For example, in December 2020, the country task force verified the looting of all medical supplies from a health facility in Upper Nile State by SPLA-IO forces cantoned at the Liang cantonment site. In another instance, in August 2021, the National Salvation Front attacked the Nyori primary health-care centre in Central Equatoria and looted medicines, all laboratory equipment, radios and nutrition supplies for children. A fridge used for storing medication was destroyed, and some medical supplies and documents were burned. Medical staff were physically assaulted during the attack. In June 2022, in Central Equatoria, the country task force verified the looting of a primary school in Yei County by SSPDF soldiers, who destroyed the school's fence, removed its roofing sheets and stole a power generator. The attack interrupted children's access to education.

#### **Military use of schools and hospitals**

64. The United Nations verified 26 incidents of the military use of schools (25) and hospitals (1), of which 9 occurred in the second half of 2020, 5 in 2021 and 12 in the first half of 2022. The violations were attributed to government security forces, namely SSPDF (20), the National Security Service (1), SPLA-IO (2), the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (2) and forces loyal to General Nando (1). The violations occurred in Central Equatoria (12), Unity (7), Western Equatoria (2), Eastern Equatoria (2), Jonglei (2) and Western Bahr el-Ghazal (1).

65. Most of the facilities were used for accommodation services, while six schools were used to store ammunition, five to launch military offences and one as a base for military training. The status of the military use remained unknown at the time of reporting.

### **E. Abduction**

66. The abduction of 63 children (25 boys, 31 girls and 7 of unknown sex) aged between 4 months and 11 years was verified. Of these, 18 occurred in the second half of 2020, 13 in 2021 and 32 during the first half of 2022. The verification of 27 reported abductions remained ongoing at the time of writing.

67. Over 80 per cent of the violations were attributed to non-State actors, including the National Salvation Front (18), NPAM (12), SPLA-IO (10) and the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (7). SSPDF was responsible for the remaining abductions (12). Violations occurred in Unity (30), Central Equatoria (15), Western Equatoria (9) and Western Bahr el-Ghazal (5).

68. The length of the abduction periods varied, ranging from a few hours to several months.

69. In addition, four abductions of four girls in Unity State by SPLA-IO occurred prior to the reporting period, in June 2020, and were late-verified.

70. Children were abducted from sites for internally displaced persons, from their homes and along roads. Some were abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use or for sexual violence, while others were also abducted to advance military agendas and demonstrate prowess or for defying orders. However, abduction purposes were not known in most of the cases.

71. For example, in July 2020, National Salvation Front elements in Western Equatoria abducted four children (three boys and one girl) aged between six months and 16 years. The children were travelling along the Juba-Maridi road together with 23 other civilians when they were ambushed and abducted on the basis of an allegation of having defied a National Salvation Front order that banned civilians from using the road. The abductees were forced to move with the armed group to various locations before finally being released in Central Equatoria.

72. For example, in January 2022, NPAM abducted two boys aged 15 and 16 years from a camp for internally displaced persons in Unity State. They were removed from their homes, tied up and moved to another location, together with an unspecified number of other children. One of the two boys managed to escape, while the other was released following the intervention of a relative in the armed forces. The boys were abducted on suspicion of being military deserters, an allegation that they both denied. In another instance, in February 2022, two boys aged 14 and 15 years were abducted by the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction during an attack on their villages in Unity State. They were forced to carry items looted during the attack. They were later also forced to join an operation attacking other villages. The children escaped during the fighting and returned to their homes. During the same month, SPLA-IO Kitgwang forces abducted and raped three girls aged between 15 and 17 years during attacks on their villages in Unity State. All girls received medical assistance at a nearby health facility after their release.

## **F. Denial of humanitarian access**

73. The country task force verified 10 incidents of denial of humanitarian access affecting the delivery of assistance to children. Of these, two occurred in the second half of 2020, six in 2021 and two in the first half of 2022.

74. The incidents were attributed to SSPDF (1) and the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (1), although most violations were perpetrated by unidentified perpetrators (8). Half of the denials of humanitarian access occurred in Unity (5), while others were verified in Jonglei (2), Central Equatoria (1), Lakes (1) and Western Bahr el-Ghazal (1).

75. The verified incidents involved multiple forms of denial of humanitarian access, including entry restrictions for humanitarian personnel, threats and violence against humanitarian personnel, looting and ambushes on humanitarian convoys. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were most affected.

76. For example, in August 2020, unidentified perpetrators ambushed a convoy comprising two NGO vehicles, including an ambulance, in Central Equatoria. The perpetrators shot and injured one of the drivers and looted medical and nutritional supplies intended for internally displaced persons, including children. In another instance, in February 2021, SSPDF conducted a military operation against local armed youths in Unity State following earlier clashes during the same month. During the clashes, the fence of a nutrition centre of an international NGO was burned, and medical supplies worth close to \$2,500, funded by UNICEF, were looted. Following the incident, services at the centre had to be suspended.

77. Incidents of denial of humanitarian access also continued to involve the killing of humanitarian workers in the line of duty. For example, in April 2022, two humanitarian workers were killed when armed youths attacked villages in Leer County, Unity State. Following the incident, an estimated 20 humanitarian staff members had to be relocated owing to safety concerns.

## **V. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children**

### **A. Progress in the legislative and policy frameworks**

78. Accountability for perpetrators of grave violations and justice for child victims remained largely absent during the reporting period. The lack of durable peace, institutional capacity challenges and other constraints hampered the enforcement of national laws.

79. The launch by the Government of mobile general and district court martials in several parts of the country marked a positive development regarding the strengthening of accountability mechanisms. In Jonglei and Upper Nile, mobile courts were deployed in 2021 to commence trials for 60 alleged perpetrators of atrocities committed against civilians, including children. In May 2022, a court in Western Equatoria convicted a perpetrator who had abducted 13 children for purposes of recruitment and use to three years of imprisonment with hard labour.

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

80. The implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan to End and Prevent all Grave Violations against Children in South Sudan, signed in February 2020, continued throughout the reporting period, although the slow implementation of the peace agreement and the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic hampered efforts to roll out activities provided for in the plan.

81. Delays in the unification of forces, for example, slowed efforts to conduct screening and age verification exercises in military barracks and cantonment sites, as did movement constraints imposed by the Government to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This had a negative impact on the identification and release of children associated with armed forces and groups.

82. The country task force supported the establishment of two key committees at the national level, the high-level ministerial committee and the national-level technical committee, as critical oversight structures for the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan. In addition, 11 state-level technical committees in 10 states and one administrative area were formed to ensure implementation at the subnational level.

83. Capacity-building and awareness-raising targeting a wide range of stakeholders remained central to the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan and was consistently supported by the United Nations. During the reporting period, the country task force provided 60 child protection training sessions for 2,038 participants (1,668 men and 370 women), including 1,101 members of government security forces (923 men and 178 women), 336 SPLA-IO members (302 men and 34 women), 45 SSOA members (44 men and 1 woman), 274 government officials (202 men and 72 women), 258 community members (182 men and 76 women) and 24 protection partners (15 men and 9 women). In addition, 240 awareness-raising sessions benefited 9,898 participants (6,499 men and 3,399 women), including 3,883 members of government security forces (2,979 men and 904 women), 162 SPLA-IO members (all men), 620 government officials (478 men and 142 women), 5,031 community members (2,813 men and 2,218 women) and 202 protection partners (67 men and 135 women).

84. The country task force also conducted training sessions for recently defected forces planning to integrate into SSPDF. In June 2022, a two-day capacity-building

training session was provided for forces loyal to General Lokujo in Kajo Kaji following their integration into SSPDF. A total of 60 soldiers (52 men and 8 women) benefited from the activity.

85. The country task force further supported the Government and partners in holding a national conference on the protection of children in South Sudan, in line with the provisions of the Comprehensive Action Plan. From 24 to 26 May 2022, 125 stakeholders (82 men and 43 women) drawn from all states of South Sudan gathered in Juba to discuss the way forward in improving the protection of children in the country. The event was opened jointly by the Vice-President and Chair of the Gender and Youth Cluster, Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba. The conference produced 15 resolutions and 22 recommendations on strengthening child protection, including calls for the Government to increase the budget allocation for child protection and strengthen accountability systems on child rights violations.

86. During her two-day visit to Juba on 23 and 24 May 2022 to open and attend the national conference, Ms. Gamba held meetings with Mr. Kiir, Mr. Machar, Ms. Nyandeng de Mabior, the Council of Ministers, the diplomatic community in Juba and United Nations counterparts. In her engagements, she emphasized the need to ensure the swift and full implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan and reiterated the support of the United Nations for relevant initiatives. She also advocated for all stakeholders to move towards the prevention of grave violations against children and strengthen the Ministry of Justice with a child focal point.

87. On 11 June 2022, Mr. Kiir issued a decree on the formation of the National Human Rights Council, a body tasked with promoting and advocating for human rights, to be chaired by the Minister of Justice and comprising the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the SSPDF Child Protection Directorate. As the Council is answerable to the President, it is set to provide a direct link between the Office of the President and the two high-level committees established to oversee the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan, thereby elevating the children and armed conflict agenda at the national level. In this regard, the inclusion of the SSPDF Child Protection Directorate in the Council is particularly innovative.

### **C. Programmatic responses, advocacy and outreach on child protection**

88. During the reporting period, engagements by the country task force and the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission with armed forces and armed groups resulted in the formal release of 18 children (all boys) from forces loyal to General Nando (11) in Western Equatoria and from SSPDF (7) in Lakes. An additional 11 children (10 boys and 1 girl) escaped from forces loyal to General Nando (7), the SPLA-IO Kitgwang faction (2), SSPDF (1) and SPLA-IO (1).

89. The National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, UNICEF and implementing partners provided 567 children (436 boys and 131 girls) with interim care, family-tracing, reunification, psychosocial support and livelihood training as part of the UNICEF three-year reintegration programme in South Sudan. They included children released in previous years who continued to benefit from the programme. Overall, the reintegration of children remained a significant challenge given the lack of school and vocational training institutions. Children who have completed their primary school education often lack access to secondary education owing to the absence of institutions in their proximity, while young people enrolled

in the few vocational institutions in South Sudan lack opportunities to practise their skills and access livelihood opportunities given the dire economic environment.

90. Considering the significant impact of explosive remnants of war on children, one of the leading causes of the killing and maiming of children, mine action activities remained highly relevant in South Sudan.

## **VI. Observations and recommendations**

91. **I am encouraged by the overall decrease in grave violations against children in South Sudan since my previous report. I remain concerned, however, by ongoing grave violations committed against children by all parties to conflict, including government security forces, in particular recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and rape and other forms of sexual violence. I am also concerned about continued attacks on schools and hospitals and the continued military use of schools. I condemn these violations and reiterate my call for all parties to put an end to and prevent them and uphold their responsibilities under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.**

92. **I welcome the increased access to barracks provided by the Government to the United Nations for screening and age verification exercises and encourage the continuation of such efforts, but I remain concerned by the number of children recruited and used, in particular by government security forces. I call upon the Government and other parties to immediately cease and prevent all violations, to facilitate humanitarian assistance and protect humanitarian personnel and to release associated children.**

93. **I am troubled by the high number of children killed and maimed and by the fact that over half of child casualties have been caused by explosive remnants of war. I urge all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and better protect children, including in the conduct of military operations and from the risks and effects of explosive remnants of war.**

94. **I reiterate my concern about the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in South Sudan. I call upon the Government to put an end to these heinous crimes, including by strengthening the legal framework to prosecute sexual and gender-based crimes and providing services, reparations and redress to survivors.**

95. **I am deeply concerned about the protracted nature of the conflict in South Sudan and the escalating intercommunal violence that has a devastating impact on children. I call on the Government to take the necessary steps to break the cycle of violence and to address the underlying causes of conflict.**

96. **I call on the Government to combat impunity for grave violations against children, to ensure that victims and survivors receive justice and to hold perpetrators accountable, including through the designation of a focal point on children and armed conflict in the Ministry of Justice. I further encourage the Government to engage with the United Nations to strengthen the overall legal framework to safeguard children's rights in South Sudan.**

97. **I encourage the Government to endorse the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and I call on the Government to fully implement the Safe Schools Declaration, which it has endorsed.**

98. I underline the importance of implementing the Revitalized Agreement, including its provisions relating to children, and of taking child protection concerns into account in any future peace negotiations. I call for the dissemination and application of the Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict.

99. I welcome the commitment of the parties to the Revitalized Agreement to the Comprehensive Action Plan and urge them to expeditiously implement all of its provisions fully, including those on addressing conflict-related sexual violence, and I call on the Government to budget accordingly. I reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to support and monitor the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan.

100. The United Nations will also continue to support broader efforts to enhance the capacity of law enforcement institutions and to address the root causes of conflict, inequalities, gender-based violence and a culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence.

101. I encourage the parties to the conflict to continue to cooperate with the United Nations and the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission. I reiterate the need for sustainable, timely and child-sensitive reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, survivor-centred and gender-sensitive services and assistance programmes for survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform and demining, and I call upon the Government to invest in these efforts.

102. I also call upon donors to redouble their efforts to provide financial support and technical assistance in this regard.

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