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Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Mali

1. During a closed videoconference meeting held on 20 November 2020, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict examined the third report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali (S/2020/1105), which covers the period from July 2017 to March 2020 and was introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Permanent Representative of Mali to the United Nations also addressed the Working Group (see annex).
2. The members of the Working Group welcomed the report of the Secretary-General, in accordance with Security Council resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), and took note of the analysis and recommendations contained therein.
3. The members of the Working Group expressed deep concern at the increase in the six grave violations which continue to be committed against children affected by armed conflict in Mali; they were particularly concerned by recruitment and use, killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access. They noted that when attribution of responsibility was possible most cases were attributed to armed groups; they urged all parties to conflict to immediately halt these violations and uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law; they further expressed concern at the rise in intercommunal conflict that takes a heavy toll on children; they expressed concern at the new cases of recruitment and use of children by the Malian armed forces and called on the Government of Mali, whose establishment as a transitional arrangement was recognized by Security Council Presidential Statement 2020/10 of 15 October 2020, to end and prevent child recruitment and use, including through the swift adoption of the draft national law on child protection; while welcoming advances in child protection through the transitional justice process, they called for increased efforts from the Government to address the prevalence of impunity, to hold perpetrators of the six grave violations against children to account and to ensure that all victims have access to justice and comprehensive specialized services; welcoming steps taken by the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) and the Platform coalition of armed groups towards the implementation and adoption of an action plan, they called for additional efforts; they also underscored the importance of the allocation of sufficient child protection capacity to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); finally, they recalled the visit of the



Working Group to Mali in 2019 and the importance of following up on relevant recommendations formulated during that visit.

4. Further to the meeting, and subject to and consistent with applicable international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), the Working Group agreed to direct action as set out below.

Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group

5. The Working Group agreed to address a message, through a public statement issued by the Chair of the Working Group:

To all parties to armed conflict in Mali

(a) Strongly condemning all violations and abuses committed against children by all parties to the conflict in Mali, and urging all parties concerned to immediately end and prevent all violations and abuses involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access and to comply with their obligations under international law;

(b) Calling upon the parties to the conflict to further implement the previous conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Mali ([S/AC.51/2018/1](#));

(c) Noting with concern that insecurity and access restrictions to conflict-affected areas during the reporting period presented challenges to the verification of violations and abuses against children and that the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General therefore does not reflect the full impact of armed conflict on children in Mali during the reporting period;

(d) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict; stressing that all perpetrators of the six grave violations must be brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay, including through timely and systematic investigations and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction; and underscoring that all victims must be ensured access to justice and to the medical and support services that they need;

(e) Noting that, on 13 July 2012, the transitional authorities of Mali referred the situation in Mali since January 2012 to the International Criminal Court, to which Mali is a State party, and that some of the above-mentioned acts may amount to crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;

(f) Underscoring that child protection provisions should be fully taken into account by all stakeholders engaged in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, as appropriate;

(g) Expressing deep concern at and condemnation of the continued increase in the recruitment and use of children, noting that signatory armed groups and their splinter groups were the main perpetrators; further expressing concern at the 45 cases of recruitment and use by the Malian armed forces, as verified by the United Nations country task force during the reporting period; and strongly urging all parties to immediately release, without preconditions, all children from their ranks, hand them over to the relevant civilian child protection actors, and end and prevent further recruitment and use of children in line with their obligations as set out in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

(h) Expressing grave concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed groups; acknowledging that some children lacked valid civil documentation to prove their age; emphasizing that children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups, including groups designated as terrorists, and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts should be treated primarily as victims, and urging the Government of Mali to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol thereto on the involvement of children in armed conflict and calling for continued implementation of the Protocol on the Release and Handover of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups signed by the United Nations and the Government of Mali in 2013;

(i) Expressing deep concern at the sharp increase of the number of children killed or maimed, including as a direct or indirect result of ethnic strife, rising intercommunal violence, crossfire during clashes among armed groups and incidents with explosive remnants of war or improvised explosive devices; and calling upon parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined therein;

(j) Expressing grave concern about incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children; noting that such acts included forced marriage and attempted rape; urging all parties to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children by members of their respective groups or forces, and stressing the importance of accountability for those who commit sexual violence against children; noting with concern the difficulty to track, document and verify such violations and abuses owing to several factors, including prevailing insecurity, lack of protection for survivors and witnesses, impunity, stigma, limited access to justice and sociocultural barriers, resulting in an underreporting of the prevalence of cases of sexual violence against children that may have occurred in Mali during the reporting period, and stressing the importance of providing non-discriminatory and comprehensive specialized services, including psychosocial, health, legal and livelihood support and services, for survivors of sexual violence;

(k) Strongly condemning attacks on schools and hospitals, the number of which more than tripled during the reporting period; calling upon all parties to the armed conflict to comply with applicable international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals, including their personnel, as such, and to end and prevent disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks or threats of attacks against those institutions and their personnel, as well as the military use of schools and hospitals in violation of applicable international law, as guided by the Safe Schools Declaration, which was endorsed by the Government of Mali in February 2018; and noting that the education and health systems remained deeply affected by the conflict, depriving 378,300 children of their fundamental rights to education and basic health care;

(l) Strongly condemning the abduction of children related to growing insecurity and intensification of armed groups' activities, including the recruitment and use of children, and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children;

(m) Expressing grave concern at incidents of denial of humanitarian access, including attacks on humanitarian personnel and restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid to children, and calling upon all parties to conflict to allow and facilitate, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law, safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access, consistent with United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance as well as the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, to respect the exclusively humanitarian nature and impartiality of humanitarian aid and to respect the work of

all United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners without adverse distinction;

To the Government of Mali

(n) Stressing the primary role of the Government in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict in Mali; recalling that Mali is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict; affirming that the gradual restoration and extension of State authority across the territory of Mali would contribute significantly to the stability of the country, and recognizing the importance of strengthening national capacities in that regard;

(o) Commending the commitment and efforts of the Government of Mali for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, in particular through the implementation of a national policy on child protection and promotion and the strengthening of its national legal framework; further commending the collaboration between the Government and the country task force to reinforce community-based mechanisms focused on the prevention of the six grave violations and the identification of and provision of care for children released from armed forces and groups, as well as to children at risk of recruitment and re-recruitment; and encouraging the Government to continue such efforts and to finalize the revision of the draft national law on child protection, in order to implement its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child with regard to the recruitment and use of children below the age of 18 in armed conflict and to swiftly adopt it;

(p) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict, stressing that all perpetrators of the six grave violations must be brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay, including through timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction; expressing concern at limited progress with regards to the fight against impunity through investigations, prosecution and conviction of suspected perpetrators of grave violations against children, inter alia due to the security situation; calling for increased efforts by the Government to address the prevalence of impunity, to hold perpetrators of the six grave violations against children to account and to ensure that all victims have access to justice and comprehensive specialized services, including psychosocial, health, legal and livelihood support and services for survivors of sexual violence;

(q) Encouraging the Government to address the new cases of recruitment and use by the Malian armed forces; urging the Government to work with the United Nations to review allegations of child recruitment and use by its armed forces and to reinforce effective age assessment procedures within the ongoing reform of the security sector; encouraging the institutionalization of child protection trainings for the Malian Defence and Security Forces;

(r) Expressing concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed groups; acknowledging that some children lacked valid civil documentation to prove their age; welcoming the release from detention by the Malian authorities of 79 children and calling on authorities to fully implement the Protocol on the Release and Handover of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups and to work with the United Nations to review the cases of children whose age could not be determined and who remained detained for alleged association with armed groups; emphasizing that children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups, including those groups designated as terrorist groups, and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts

should be treated primarily as victims; urging the Government to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, in particular that the deprivation of liberty for children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period and to prioritize their reintegration, as guided by the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), which it has endorsed;

(s) Recalling the Government's endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration while expressing concern about the military use of schools by government forces during the reporting period in violation of its obligations under international law, stressing the importance of access to education and health care for all children in Mali, and calling upon it to ensure that schools and related personnel are protected and that any schools damaged in the course of military operations are repaired and rehabilitated;

(t) Encouraging the Government to adopt the draft law to annul the 30-day legal deadline for birth registration in order to restore children's fundamental right to an identity;

(u) Encouraging the Government to focus on long-term and sustainable reintegration and rehabilitation opportunities for children affected by armed conflict that are gender- and age-sensitive, including access to health care, psychosocial support, and education programmes, as well as raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of these children and facilitate their return, while taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys, to contribute to the well-being of children and to sustainable peace and security; in that regard calling upon the Government to ensure that all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes required by the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation and security sector reforms take into account the specific needs of boys and girls, including through the development of a gender-sensitive and age-sensitive process;

(v) Welcoming advances in the truth seeking, justice and reconciliation process and encouraging the Government to continue cooperating with the country task force to enable its support to the Malian Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission towards further promoting children's participation in the reconciliation process;

To all armed groups mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, specifically those listed in the annex to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict

(w) Strongly condemning all violations and abuses committed against children in Mali; strongly urging all armed groups to immediately and without preconditions release all children associated with them, hand over all children within their ranks to civilian child protection actors for their reintegration into their communities and end and prevent further recruitment and use of children;

(x) Expressing strong concern at the high number of children killed and maimed, including by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, and urging all armed groups to not target civilians, including children, and to take concrete measures to reduce their impact on children;

(y) Strongly urging all armed groups to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children by members of their respective groups, and stressing the importance of accountability for those who commit sexual and gender-based violence;

(z) Expressing strong concern at the large increase in number of attacks against schools and related personnel, which has had a severe impact on access to education for 378,300 children, and calling upon all armed groups to comply with applicable international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals, including their personnel, as such, and to end and prevent attacks or threats of attacks against those institutions and their personnel, as well as the military use of schools in violation of applicable international law;

(aa) Expressing concern about the security challenges facing the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in the north and centre of Mali, and in this regard urging armed groups to ensure United Nations personnel safe and unhindered access to territories under their control for monitoring and reporting purposes;

(bb) Commending the continued collaboration between CMA and the United Nations to accelerate the implementation by CMA of its action plan; encouraging CMA to swiftly implement it and to facilitate United Nations access to the areas under its control for the purpose of delivering assistance to children, monitoring progress in the implementation of the action plan and verifying allegations;

(cc) Welcoming steps taken by the Platform coalition of armed groups to adopt an action plan on child recruitment and use; calling upon Platform's leadership to translate its commitments into action by swiftly signing and fully implementing the action plan;

(dd) Further calling upon all non-State armed groups to publicly express their commitment to end and prevent all violations and abuses committed against children, and to expeditiously develop, adopt and implement action plans in line with Security Council resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#) if they are listed in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

6. The Working Group agreed to address a message to community and religious leaders, through a public statement by its Chair:

(a) Emphasizing the important role of community and religious leaders in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict;

(b) Urging them to publicly condemn and continue to advocate ending and preventing violations and abuses against children, in particular those involving the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, , abductions and attacks and threats of attacks against schools and hospitals, and to engage with the Government, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to support the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict in their communities, including by raising awareness to avoid the stigmatization of these children.

Recommendations to the Security Council

7. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter addressed to the Government of Mali:

(a) Stressing the primary role of the Government in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict in Mali and recalling that Mali is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict; affirming that the gradual restoration and extension of State authority across the territory of Mali would contribute significantly to the stability of the country, and recognizing the importance of strengthening national capacities in that regard;

(b) Commending the commitment and efforts of the Government of Mali for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, in particular through the implementation of a national policy on child protection and promotion and the strengthening of its national legal framework; further commending the collaboration between the Government and the country task force to reinforce community-based mechanisms focused on the prevention of the six grave violations and the identification of and provision of care for children released from armed forces and groups, as well as to children at risk of recruitment and re-recruitment; and encouraging the Government to continue such efforts and to finalize the revision of the draft national law on child protection, in order to implement its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child with regard to the recruitment and use of children below the age of 18 in armed conflict and to swiftly adopt it;

(c) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict, stressing that all perpetrators of the six grave violations must be brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay, including through timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction; expressing concern at limited progress with regards to the fight against impunity through investigations, prosecution and conviction of suspected perpetrators of the six grave violations against children, inter alia due to the security situation; calling for increased efforts on part of the Government to address the prevalence of impunity, to hold perpetrators of grave violations against children to account and to ensure that all victims have access to justice, required services and assistance;

(d) Encouraging the Government to address the new cases of recruitment and use by the Malian armed forces; urging the Government to work with the United Nations to review allegations of child recruitment and use by its armed forces and to reinforce effective age assessment procedures within the ongoing reform of the security sector; encouraging the institutionalization of child protection trainings for the Malian Defence and Security Forces;

(e) Expressing concern about the deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed groups; acknowledging that some children lacked valid civil documentation to prove their age; welcoming the release from detention by the Malian authorities of 79 children and calling on authorities to fully implement the Protocol on the Release and Handover of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups and to work with the United Nations to review the cases of children whose age could not be determined and who remained detained for alleged association with armed groups; emphasizing that children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups, including those groups designated as terrorist, and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts should be treated primarily as victims; urging the Government to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, in particular that the deprivation of liberty for children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period, and to prioritize their reintegration, as guided by the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), which it has endorsed;

(f) Recalling the Government's endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration while expressing concern about the military use of schools by government forces during the reporting period in violation of its obligations under international law, stressing the importance of access to education and health care for all children in Mali, and calling upon it to ensure that schools and related personnel are protected

and that any schools damaged in the course of military operations are repaired and rehabilitated;

(g) Encouraging the Government to adopt the draft law to annul the 30-day legal deadline for birth registration to restore children's fundamental right to an identity;

(h) Encouraging the Government to focus on long-term and sustainable reintegration and rehabilitation opportunities for children affected by armed conflict that are gender-sensitive and age-sensitive, including access to health care, psychosocial support, and education programmes, as well as raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of these children and facilitate their return, while taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys, to contribute to the well-being of children and to sustainable peace and security; in that regard calling upon the Government to ensure that all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes required by the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation and security sector reforms take into account the specific needs of boys and girls, including through the development of a gender-sensitive and age-sensitive DDR process;

(i) Welcoming advances in the truth seeking, justice and reconciliation process and encouraging the Government to continue cooperating with the Country Task Force to enable its support to the Malian Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission towards further promoting children's participation in the reconciliation process.

8. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter to the Secretary-General:

(a) Requesting the Secretary-General to continue to ensure the effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict in Mali and to maintain the child protection component of MINUSMA, including through the deployment of child protection advisers throughout MINUSMA areas of operation, in line with the mandate of the Mission, and noting that their key tasks include, in line with the Policy on Child Protection in United Nations Peace Operations adopted in 2017, monitoring and reporting on grave violations and abuses committed against children, mainstreaming child protection within the Mission, training the Mission personnel and engaging in dialogue on action plans;

(b) Also requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that MINUSMA and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) continue their efforts to further support, in line with their respective mandates, the Malian authorities in mainstreaming the specific needs of children affected by the armed conflict and the protection of their rights in all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes and security sector reform, in establishing a joint mechanism for the review of cases of children detained on charges related to the armed conflict and association with armed groups, in conducting a screening and age assessment of the Malian Defence and Security Forces and in establishing recruitment procedures and age assessment measures to prevent underage recruitment;

(c) Further requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting continues its advocacy for the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups and children detained on charges related to association with armed groups and prioritizes its efforts to reach out to non-State armed groups, with a view to developing action plans to end the recruitment and use of children in violation of applicable international law, as well as rape and sexual violence, and to address other violations and abuses committed against children in Mali.

9. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter by the Chair of the Working Group to the President of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Governments of the States members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel):

(a) Welcoming the commitments made by the African Union and the States members of the G5 Sahel to peace and security in Mali and the protection of children affected by armed conflict;

(b) Welcoming the cooperation between the States members of G5 Sahel and the United Nations regarding child protection issues, including through the establishment of a compliance framework as set out in Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#); and encouraging the G5 Sahel to fully implement the child protection aspects contained in this compliance framework and inviting the G5 Sahel and the country task force to coordinate as appropriate;

(c) Underscoring the importance of keeping the protection of children as a priority in the planning and conduct of military operations and of transferring children associated with armed groups captured during operations to child protection actors as required by the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel;

10. The Working Group agreed to recommend the following to the Security Council:

(a) To ensure that the situation of children and armed conflict in Mali continues to be duly taken into consideration by the Council when reviewing the mandate of MINUSMA and its activities;

(b) To ensure the continuation of a child protection mandate for MINUSMA.

11. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter to the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2374 \(2017\)](#) concerning Mali and the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities:

(a) Recalling paragraph 7 (b) of resolution [1882 \(2009\)](#), by which the Security Council requested enhanced communication between the Working Group and relevant Security Council sanctions committees, including through the exchange of pertinent information on violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict;

(b) Encouraging the continued sharing of relevant information by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict with the Committee and the Working Group;

(c) Encouraging the Committee to continue to consider the designation for sanctions of individuals and entities, in accordance with the rules and guidelines of the Committee.

Direct action by the Working Group

12. The Working Group agreed to address letters from the Chair of the Working Group to the World Bank and other donors:

(a) Requesting donors to provide funding and assistance to support the Government of Mali and relevant humanitarian and development actors in providing release and reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups and training of the Malian Defence and Security Forces on the protection of children, in bolstering the education and health system, especially in

northern and central Mali, in ensuring timely and appropriate care for child victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence, through facilitating the provision of services for victims, including addressing deficiencies in the criminal justice system that undermine the access of victims to justice, and improving the geographical coverage and quality of care;

(b) Urging donors that support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes and security sector reform to mainstream child protection and ensure that the specific needs of girls and boys affected by the armed conflict are fully taken into account at all stages of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process and in security sector reform programmes;

(c) Highlighting the importance of mine risk education programmes for children in order to prevent the killing and maiming of children and reduce the impact of mines, unexploded ordnance, cluster munition and explosive remnants of war on children;

(d) Appealing to donors working alongside the United Nations system to support the efforts of the Government in the promotion of birth and late-birth registration as a means to prevent underage recruitment;

(e) Reiterating that the Security Council called upon regional and international partners to support, through voluntary contributions, technical assistance and advice, efforts in the establishment and implementation of the compliance framework by the States members of G5 Sahel and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and encouraged all relevant partners, including relevant United Nations entities, the European Union military mission to contribute to the training of the Malian armed forces, the European Union capacity-building mission in Mali and the French forces, within the framework of their respective mandates and existing resources, to support the implementation of the compliance framework and to ensure close coordination of their activities in that regard;

(f) Requesting donors to fully fund appeals for child protection in the Mali humanitarian response plan and at a minimum ensure that child protection is funded at the same level as the overall appeal;

(g) Inviting donors to keep the Working Group informed of their funding and assistance efforts as appropriate; and further inviting donors to prioritize close consultation with the Government of Mali.

Annex**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mali to the United Nations to the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict***

Mister Chairman;

Distinguished members of the Working Group;

Madam Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. First of all, I would like to thank you, Mister Chairman, for your leadership and your kind invitation to this important meeting for my Country, Mali. I'm happy to extend my appreciation to Members of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for organizing this meeting.
2. The Government of Mali takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali. And I commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Madam Virginia Gamba, for her presentation.
3. We welcome the conclusions of the visit carried out by the Working Group to Mali from 8 to 11 December 2019.
4. Now, allow me to make the following comments, on behalf of my Government:
5. As highlighted in the report of the SG, Mali and its neighboring Sahel Countries continue to be seriously affected by the criminal activities of terrorist groups and other armed groups. They are attacking and killing our defense and security forces, our civilian populations, including women and children. They are stealing the livestock, burning crops... They are responsible for posing landmines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), just to kill... And most importantly, they have succeeded in promoting amalgams and rhetoric that are fueling inter-communal violence in the Center and the North of Mali. Because of these amalgams, our communities, which used to live together on the same land and share the common resources (land, water, schools, health facilities ...) are now fighting each other, even killing each other, in the context of mistrust and scarcity of resources.
6. This is unfortunately the daily life of the Malian people, since January 2012. This is the daily reality in Mali, since the beginning of our complex and challenging crisis, affecting particularly vulnerable persons with specific needs i.e. women, children and elders.
7. Because of this insecurity in this North and the Center of Mali, we have 25% of our schools are closed. And more than 115 000 children are not going to school, nowadays. We all know the reason why terrorist networks target schools and children in the first place. They want to continue their criminal business, by taking advantage of children's mind and vulnerabilities.
8. I made these points to show you how Mali and myself attach great importance for your work of this Working Group and to the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

* The present annex is being issued without formal editing.

9. My second comment is to underline the commitment of the Government of Mali to continue to fulfill its obligations under the International legal instruments we have ratified. You all recalled that before this crisis, Mali was considered as a good example of countries respecting the basic rights of its people. And despite all the challenges we are facing today, the Government of Mali will continue to assume its primary responsibility to protect its people, especially women and children and to provide access to basic services.

10. This gives me the opportunity to reply to some findings of the reports. In its paragraph 14, the report mentions that 45 children from 9 to 17 are recruited and used by the FAMA, the Mali National defense and security forces. I firmly reject this accusation. It's not just true. We have never done such a thing and we will never do it. Our National Army has a rigorous and well-established recruitment process that leaves no room at all for the recruitment and use of 1 single child.

I would have appreciated if these serious allegations were given with more details on the places, timeframe and units involved, in order to enable us to investigate.

11. What I know for sure is the fact that Mali has signed in 2013 an agreement with the UN system, particularly UNICEF. And in line with the relevant provisions of this Agreement, the Gendarmerie of Mali, as indicated in the report, hands over children captured by our National Forces in the context of counter-terrorism operations. They have 48 hours after the capture to do so. We just note children basic information, there is no investigation and they released. This situation creates a dilemma for us; if we release these children, we are accused of promoting impunity; if we do otherwise, we violate the rights of children.

12. Regarding the use of schools for military purposes, also mentioned in the report, let me stress that Mali remains fully committed to providing education to all children, not only because it is our primary responsibility to do so, but also because we adhered to relevant international Frameworks in that regard, including the Declaration on Safety in Schools and the UNICEF Global Action on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We don't use schools as military facilities. We rather protect our schools, students and teachers, in a context where if there is no school, security forces have to secure these facilities to prevent them from being used or occupied by enemy combatants.

13. The Government of Mali will continue to support the campaign "ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict!", launched globally in New York by the Special Representative, Madame Virginia Gamba in April 2019 and in July 2019 in Bamako.

14. My Government of Mali will continue to pay a special attention to the fundamental rights of children, including the right to proper education. In this regard, Mali is grateful to all its partners, including UNICEF, which is helping the Government implement national programs related to social reinsertion of children affected by the crisis, particularly by allowing these children to access education and professional training.

15. My last comment will be to stress that the best way to put an end to all the challenges outlined in the report is to help Mali restore its authorities on its territory. Many allegations mentioned in the report took place in regions where State presence is either weak or totally absent, due to insecurity. This is the reason why Mali opened its door for regional and international support. This is the reason why I reiterate our call for more cooperation with Mali in restoring the State presence and authority, which will create an environment of stability for representatives of the Government, including teachers, doctors, judges and other public services to provide peace dividend to all our populations in need.

16. We call on international cooperation, because terrorism and violent extremism are among the global challenges of our today's world. We have a shared responsibility. As country, Mali will continue to do its part.

▶ The Transition Government has pledged its commitment to continue the implementation of the Algiers 2015 Peace Agreement in full and in a timely manner, including the DDR program.

▶ The Government of Transition will implement the long overdue political and institutional reforms;

▶ We are committed to disarming all the militias;

▶ We will continue dialogue to solve internal issue among communities;

▶ We will organize free and fair elections to end the Transition period and to hand over to the newly elected authorities ...

17. To conclude, I would like to stress that, despite all our challenges, the Government of Mali will continue to work for lasting peace, respect for human rights and sustainable development for our people.

I thank you for your attention.
