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Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Colombia

1. During a formal meeting on 10 February 2022, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict examined the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Colombia ([S/2021/1022](#)), covering the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2021, which was introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations also addressed the Working Group.

2. The members of the Working Group welcomed the positive steps undertaken to address the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict in Colombia during the reporting period; however, they also expressed deep concern at the violations and abuses that continue to be committed. The Working Group welcomed efforts by the Government of Colombia to prevent and respond to violations and abuses against children, especially migrant and refugee children and those at risk of statelessness, and emphasized the need to continue to pay particular attention to the vulnerable situation of children from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The Working Group further expressed deep concern that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and risks for children affected by armed conflict. The Working Group emphasized the importance of reintegration support and ensuring that children's voices were heard in the peace process. The Working Group also discussed the need to protect schools and educational facilities.

3. The members of the Working Group welcomed the report of the Secretary-General. 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 \(2015\)](#), [2427 \(2018\)](#) and [2601 \(2021\)](#), the Working Group agreed to the direct action set out below.

Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group

4. The Working Group agreed to address the following message to all parties to armed conflict in Colombia, including Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) dissident groups; the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN); the Clan del Golfo/Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC); the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), also known as Los Pelusos; Los Caparrapos, also known as Los Caparros; as well as the Colombian armed forces; and the Colombian national police and other parties mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, through a public statement by its Chair:



(a) Commending the positive steps the country has undertaken since the signing of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace (hereafter “the peace agreement”) between the Government and FARC-EP in Bogotá on 24 November 2016, which set as guiding principles the best interest of the child, that children who have been separated from armed groups should be treated as victims, and a focus on community-based reintegration, marking the fifth anniversary of the peace agreement and calling for its continued and full implementation and for it to continue to serve as a model for the protection of children in other peace processes;

(b) Encouraging the pursuit of possible negotiated solutions to armed conflict with other armed groups, calling for the integration, from the early stages on and where in the best interest of affected children, of child protection provisions, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children, as well as provisions on the rights and well-being of children, into peace negotiations and ceasefire and peace agreements, as well as into provisions for ceasefire monitoring, taking into account children’s views, where possible, in these processes, and encouraging all relevant actors involved in peace and mediation processes to use, as much as possible, the Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict as a tool in these processes;

(c) Welcoming the decrease in the number of violations and abuses committed against children verified by the country task force on monitoring and reporting compared with the prior reporting period, but noting with concern that the number of cases involving the six grave violations against children did not decrease during the reporting period;

(d) Expressing, however, grave concern at the continued expansion of territorial presence and reconfiguration by armed groups, including the ELN, AGC and FARC-EP dissident groups, in particular in the rural areas marked by a limited presence of State authority, and the continued displacement of, and violations and abuses against, children, and noting that indigenous and Afro-Colombian children have been disproportionately affected by these conflict dynamics;

(e) Expressing grave concern at the violations and abuses that continue to be committed against children in Colombia, and urging all parties to immediately end and prevent all violations and abuses of human rights and all violations of international law, including the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access, and to comply fully with their obligations under international law, expressing grave concern that children from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities remain disproportionately affected, noting that children from these communities often live in the areas that are most affected by conflict, which are generally also characterized by high levels of poverty, a limited presence of State authority, illicit economies and the presence of armed groups;

(f) Stressing that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration, and that the specific needs and vulnerabilities of girls and boys should be duly considered, when planning and carrying out actions concerning children in situations of armed conflict;

(g) Calling upon all parties to further implement the previous conclusions of the Working Group;

(h) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict and stressing that all those responsible for crimes in this regard must be brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay,

including through comprehensive, independent, timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, prosecution, conviction and sentencing, including, when applicable, through the transitional justice mechanisms of the peace agreement;

(i) Condemning the continued recruitment and use of children, including children from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and refugee and migrant children, noting that nearly all cases were attributed to armed groups, and noting that children were used in combat, as well as in support roles such as informants, porters and in connection with illicit trafficking, as well as for sexual purposes, urging all parties to end and prevent further recruitment and use of children and immediately release without preconditions all children present in their ranks, and noting with concern that the recruitment and use of children has often led to other violations and abuses, including killing and maiming, sexual violence and abduction;

(j) Expressing grave concern at the killing and maiming of children, including as a result of gunfire, anti-personnel mines, improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance, aerial attacks and cruel or inhuman treatment, noting that children were also directly targeted for alleged association with opposing armed groups, noting with concern that Colombia is one of the countries most affected by the presence of explosive devices, which pose unacceptably high immediate and long-term risks and constituted a major cause of the killing and maiming of children during the reporting period, and urging all parties to cease the killing and maiming of children, to end immediately and definitively the use of indiscriminate explosive devices and to destroy any such devices remaining in their arsenal;

(k) Strongly condemning rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children and urging all parties to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent it, noting that the full scale of sexual violence and exploitation against children is believed to be underreported, expressing concern that movement restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have increased vulnerabilities and risk factors for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in areas affected by the armed conflict, including in border areas, and stressing the importance of providing non-discriminatory and comprehensive age- and gender-appropriate specialized services to survivors of sexual violence, including mental health and psychosocial support, health – including sexual and reproductive health services, and legal and livelihood support and services;

(l) Strongly condemning the abduction of children and urging all armed groups to cease the abduction of children and immediately release without preconditions all abducted children, noting children were abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use, as well as on the suspicion of being informants;

(m) Strongly condemning attacks on schools and hospitals, urging all parties to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals, including their personnel, as such, and to immediately end and prevent attacks or threats of attacks against those institutions and their personnel in violation of applicable international law, expressing concern that the use of schools for military purposes by armed forces and groups placed students at risk and interfered with their education and protection support, calling on all parties to take concrete measures to mitigate and avoid the use of schools, consistent with resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#), and noting in this regard the Safe Schools Declaration;

(n) Strongly condemning the incidents of denial of humanitarian access, and urging all parties to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access to children, consistent with 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.

5. The Working Group agreed to address a message, through a public statement by the Chair of the Working Group, to community and religious leaders and civil society organizations:

(a) Emphasizing the important role of community, religious and indigenous leaders in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict, and recognizing their important role in advocating for an end to violations and abuses against children;

(b) Encouraging 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, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, killing and maiming, abductions, attacks and threats of attacks against schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access, and to engage with the Government, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to support the reintegration and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict in their communities, including by raising awareness and undertaking efforts to avoid stigmatization of these children.

Recommendations to the Security Council

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

(a) To continue to consider the situation of children affected by armed conflict in Colombia when the situation in Colombia is addressed by the Council;

(b) To call upon parties to conflict in Colombia to fully respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law and international refugee law, as applicable, and to prevent and put an end to all violations and abuses against children;

(c) To urge armed groups to adopt and implement commitments to release all children present in their ranks immediately and to end child recruitment and use;

(d) To encourage the country task force on monitoring and reporting and other relevant United Nations entities to continue their engagement and efforts to support the Government in addressing the six grave violations committed against children affected by armed conflict, in particular with a view to engaging ELN and other armed groups to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and other violations and abuses against children;

(e) To continue to encourage the full and comprehensive implementation of the peace agreement, which is critical for consolidating the end of the conflict with the former FARC-EP and for overcoming underlying causes and building peace in the conflict-affected areas where violence continues to severely impact children.

7. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter addressed to the Government of Colombia referring to the Working Group's public statement on the violations and abuses that continue to be committed against children in Colombia:

(a) Acknowledging the continued commitment of the Government to the implementation of the peace agreement, and urging the Government to continue with the vital task of ensuring its comprehensive implementation in all territories in order to ensure sustainable peace and development and to end violations and abuses against children;

(b) Welcoming the progress that the Government of Colombia has made in preventing and responding to violations and abuses against children, including through the national plan of action issued in July 2021 to prevent the recruitment and

use of and sexual violence against children, and the launch in August 2020 of the “Súmate por mí” (Join Up for Me) strategy aimed at fostering protective environments for children at the local level, as well as the launch in June 2021 of a training plan for military and police personnel on the promotion and protection of children’s rights, and urging the Government to continue to prioritize the implementation of prevention programmes, paying particular attention to those who may be in vulnerable situations, including girls, indigenous, Afro-Colombian, refugee and migrant children, and internally displaced children, including through the allocation of sufficient resources and comprehensive evaluations of these programmes, and as guided by the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles) endorsed by the Government of Colombia;

(c) Calling on the Government to continue to implement the programme “A different path of life”, welcoming the inclusion in the programme of at least 288 individuals recognized from 2020–2021 as children at the moment of accreditation and encouraging continued efforts to reintegrate children disengaged from FARC-EP in the framework of the peace agreement, while taking into account the specific needs of boys and girls, as well as age and ethnicity, by facilitating their access to income-generating projects, reparations and psychological support, and by providing specific protection measures for beneficiaries of the programme and for the children born to former FARC-EP members;

(d) Welcoming measures adopted by the Government and encouraging the Government to continue to ensure that institutions and programmes pay particular attention to children from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and migrant and refugee children, as well as unaccompanied children, and to take measures to reunite children with their families, while noting the significant number of refugee and migrant children from neighbouring countries that were living in Colombia during the reporting period;

(e) Calling on the Government to highlight the need for special measures for children affected by security risks and the urgent strengthening of prevention mechanisms in conflict-affected areas, both within and outside former territorial areas for training and reintegration;

(f) Encouraging the Government to continue to enhance its mine-risk education activities, which were strengthened during the reporting period, and further strengthen demining efforts, including through significantly increased coordination and mine-clearance operations in affected regions;

(g) Calling on the Government to take additional measures to protect children during military operations, and to pay particular attention to children associated with armed groups, including through respecting the principles of distinction and proportionality and the obligation to take all feasible precautions and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law while conducting armed confrontations in areas in which civilians and children are present, and recalling that children associated or formerly associated with armed groups and forces should be treated primarily as victims;

(h) Urging the Government to fully engage with the Special Forum on Women and the Special Forum on Ethnic Affairs as related to the issues affecting children;

(i) Calling on the Government to prioritize the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence against children, including sex trafficking, exploitation and abuse, and to ensure that adequate programmes, specialized services and reporting channels are available and accessible to survivors of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence committed against them as children, noting the efforts made by the Government to address conflict-related sexual violence against children

during the reporting period, including through the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, and also noting that in November 2020 the Government presented new guidelines to strengthen gender equality in the Colombian armed forces and the police, with a special emphasis on the prevention of sexual violence;

(j) Calling on the Government to ensure that all those responsible for violations and abuses against children are brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay, including through comprehensive, independent, timely and systematic investigation, prosecution and conviction, and welcoming in this respect continued progress by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, including on Case No. 7, and welcoming its publication of child-focused guidelines for organizations and victims to submit reports on violations against children in armed conflict;

(k) Calling upon the Government to fully address, in the framework of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Repetition, including by addressing recommendations issued by the Truth Commission, the special protection needs of children as witnesses and victims, including children who may have been associated with armed groups, including through restorative justice processes and social rehabilitation;

(l) Encouraging the Government to strengthen its programmes and institutional response with regard to the relocation and return of displaced populations, considering the linkages between displacement and violations and abuses against children, and to facilitate their access to basic services, including education and health care, and to extend protection and prevention measures in communities subject to a state of confinement owing to the presence of, and territorial control by, armed groups;

(m) Calling on the Government to refrain from organizing civilian-military operations that put children at risk of retaliation for interacting with the armed forces, as well as at risk of being used in intelligence activities;

(n) Calling upon the Government to allocate and deploy increased resources to foster an enabling and secure environment to ensure safe access to education, in particular in areas affected by conflict where children are particularly vulnerable to recruitment and use, underlining the importance of education for long-term peace and reconciliation, and in this regard noting the Safe Schools Declaration;

(o) Encouraging the Government to further continue its constructive cooperation with the United Nations, in particular the country task force on monitoring and reporting, as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations Children's Fund, noting with appreciation its participation in initiatives such as a virtual event organized in November 2020 regarding the implementation of the Working Group's previous conclusions on children and armed conflict in Colombia, and encouraging further cooperation with other stakeholders promoting the children and armed conflict agenda, such as the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia;

(p) Inviting the Government to keep the Working Group informed of its efforts to implement the recommendations of the Working Group.

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

(a) Encouraging him to continue to call upon all parties engaged in armed conflict in Colombia to fully respect international humanitarian law, and international human rights law, as applicable, and noting the global call of the Secretary-General for an immediate cessation of hostilities, as supported by the Security Council in its resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#);

(b) Requesting him to ensure the continued effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict in Colombia, including in support of the implementation of the agreement between the Government and FARC-EP for the separation and reintegration of children signed on 15 May 2016;

(c) Also requesting him to encourage the country task force on monitoring and reporting and other relevant United Nations entities to continue their engagement and efforts to support the Government in addressing the six grave violations committed against children affected by armed conflict, in particular with a view to engaging ELN and other armed groups to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in violation of international law, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access.

Direct action by the Working Group

9. The Working Group agreed to send letters from the Chair of the Working Group to the World Bank and other donors, as follows:

(a) Stressing that the best way to protect children is through peace, and urging the World Bank and donors to continue to provide political and financial support to Colombian peacebuilding initiatives and to the implementation of the peace agreements;

(b) Calling upon the World Bank and donors to provide support to national programmes and initiatives aimed at protecting children in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, including prevention, reintegration and comprehensive development activities, timely and appropriate care for child survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, long-term and sustainable funding for mental health and psychosocial programming, the bolstering of the educational and health systems, enhancing demining efforts and the finding of durable solutions for internally displaced children, with specific attention given to children affected by the conflict in remote areas and in Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities and refugee and migrant children;

(c) Also calling upon the World Bank and donors to support the child protection efforts and initiatives of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations relating to the strengthening of national capacity-building and pertinent national institutions and their programmes, with specific attention given to children affected by the conflict in remote areas and in Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities and refugee and migrant children;

(d) Inviting the World Bank and donors to keep the Working Group informed of their funding and assistance efforts, as appropriate.

Annex

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations to the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict

New York, 10 February 2022

[Original: Spanish]

On behalf of Colombia, I would like to thank you for convening this meeting. I acknowledge the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and the other members of the Working Group, whom I thank for their important work on Colombia.

Colombia has voluntarily accepted the monitoring mechanism referred to in resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#), in line with our traditional position of openness to scrutiny and international cooperation. Our approach is constructive and it is in that spirit that we welcome this meeting.

Colombia recognizes that the protection and care of children who have been affected by armed conflict are essential to attaining sustainable peace. Successful reintegration is the key to any peace process, especially when it comes to reintegrating children who, from such a tender age, have known only the dramatic impact of violence.

The report presented today covers a period of change that began with the implementation of the agreement signed in 2016. In the reporting period, from 2019 to 2021, we faced enormous challenges but we continued to make progress toward peacebuilding. We have worked for a real transformation, as seen in a substantial decrease in violent crime and a positive impact on children's lives.

However, despite the enormous effort and the solid commitment shown by the Colombian State, grave violations of children's rights continue, perpetrated by illegal armed groups, and we will not rest until our children can live in peace, enjoy their childhood and have the hope of a better future.

Organized armed groups continue to recruit and use children. We appreciate the clear identification of these illegal groups in the report of the Secretary-General and the reiterated call it contains for an end to the killing and recruitment of our children, and other crimes against them.

The President of the Republic has defined a series of steps and measures designed to prevent recruitment that are being implemented under the government policy on the prevention of recruitment and use of and sexual violence against children by illegal groups, adopted in 2019.

As recognized in the report, all State institutions continue to apply a range of strategies to address this scourge, such as the Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of, and Sexual Violence against, Children and Adolescents, which links and coordinates the actions of 22 national government agencies in the field.

Allow me, Madam Chair, to mention some specific points that illustrate our ongoing endeavours and that, in our view, are worth highlighting:

1. As mentioned in the report, it is important to highlight the "Súmate por mí" (Join Up for Me) strategy, which makes an essential contribution to the consolidation of public management in the prevention of recruitment and the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, whom today I shall refer to together as

children, through the strengthening of community networks and protective environments at the local level. Launched in 2020, it receives the technical and financial support it needs to build institutional capacity from the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Organization for Migration, which lead efforts to strengthen and coordinate the implementation of the strategy in the departments and municipalities. We appreciate this joint work with the United Nations and other international organizations that cooperate with us in the shared objective of protecting the rights of our children.

2. As part of its programmes to prevent illegal recruitment, the Ministry of Defence trains members of law enforcement agencies to protect children's rights in the work by the immediate action teams to address real or potential threats and in relation to prevention strategies, regulations, prohibitions for the security forces specific to minors and other topics focused on the protection and care of children's particular rights. Between 2019 and 2021, 341 training sessions were carried out in the country, directly instructing more than 16,000 attendees.

The Ministry also has a standing order on training to strengthen the instruction and education of members of law enforcement agencies in human rights and international humanitarian law. In 2021, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute provided technical assistance to the Colombian armed forces, to train 80,000 troops in the promotion and protection of the rights of children and young people.

3. For its part, the child and adolescent protection unit of the national police has implemented a flagship programme called *Abre tus ojos* (Open Your Eyes), which uses teaching methods based around specific topics that address the problems, risks and vulnerabilities affecting children in contexts of violence. In that regard, it reported that in 2021 almost 50,000 (49,335) preventive actions were taken in the areas of recruitment, gender-based violence (physical, psychological, economic, sexual and domestic) and sexual violence (commercial and sexual exploitation of children, sexual abuse and trafficking for sexual exploitation and pornography), benefiting 940,107 people.

In addition, the national police released a poster for those most wanted for the crime of the recruitment of minors which, for the period covered by the report, included 11 ringleaders of the Ejército de Liberación Nacional; 10 residual organized armed group ringleaders; 6 ringleaders of the Clan del Golfo; and 3 ringleaders of Los Caparros.

4. According to information from the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, as at 8 December 2021, more than 15,000 (15,438) mine risk education activities had been conducted in high-risk areas, involving 231,391 people, including 103,198 children.

5. In addition to prevention, it is important to highlight the decisive impact of justice. There has been outstanding progress in the mega-case currently before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace.

The Judicial Panel for Acknowledgement of Truth, Responsibility and Determination of Facts and Conduct has concluded its preliminary cross-checking of the offences related to recruitment and use committed by the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, identifying a total of 18,677 victims, a provisional figure for the offences in the case.

That progress allowed the Judicial Panel to prioritize investigations of recruitment that took place between 1 January 1996 and 1 December 2016, and to establish three theories for investigations related to offences linked with recruitment: (i) sexual and gender-based violence; (ii) forced disappearance and homicide; and (iii) torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

For its part, the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation has made progress not only in investigations but also in its directives and instruments, creating special units and establishing action lines that will facilitate solving and prosecuting these crimes. These efforts include the creation of a strategy for investigations of illegal recruitment that involves analysing the dynamics particular to rural and urban violence and the impact of the presence of different armed criminal groups on the recruitment of children to swell their ranks.

At this point, I should like to emphasize that the Government of Colombia has zero tolerance for crimes committed by members of the military or police against children. We strongly reject such crimes and those responsible are swiftly brought to justice. We are grateful for the acknowledgements in the report of the progress made by the judiciary in these cases.

In relation to the aforementioned efforts, I should like to refer to some aspects of the report that require clarification, although not without first acknowledging and expressing gratitude to the Office of the High Representative for this work, which contains very important elements. The following clarifications are intended to contribute to this effort:

All prevention programmes implemented by the Ministry of Defence and law enforcement agencies must be monitored by other institutions and verified by third parties, ensuring not only that those prevention activities are fully in line with the regulations on the protection of children's rights and safety, but also that children are not revictimized by criminal groups.

The Generación Futuro (Future Generation) prevention strategy is essentially a number of humanitarian social programmes with special methodologies and teaching approaches, implemented by specialists in children and adolescents and professional personnel who work in related areas. These are not civilian-military activities. The strategy seeks to reduce risk factors and provide social, educational and cultural opportunities for many children in remote and vulnerable areas, where the programmes have encouraged these children and their families in their comprehensive development and the exercise of their rights.

These programmes in no way undermine the principle of distinction found in international humanitarian law nor can they be used to justify the actions of organized armed groups against children.

In the same vein, we would like to reiterate, as in previous years, our respectful request to the Office of the Special Representative to provide the sources of the reported figures and cases of alleged violations of children's rights, without exception, in order to encourage transparency in any assessment, review and/or comments issued by the Government.

The Office of the Attorney General of the Nation needs additional information to fully identify cases and be in a position to provide data on proceedings initiated, because without the sources of the data and the methodology used to collect the information, it is not possible to cross-check the information on offences in the oral adversarial criminal system against the cases mentioned in the report.

Indeed, after consulting the relevant agencies, some discrepancies were found in the data on forced displacement in paragraph 8, early warnings in paragraph 9, grave violations in paragraph 14 and victims of anti-personnel mines in paragraph 29.

Paragraph 50 of the report refers to 42,000 victims of armed conflict and more than 6,700 affected during childhood. However, the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, which has focused its work on events that occurred between 1958 and 2016, reported that its documented data give a total of

21,439 victims of armed conflict, of whom 3,612 were affected during their childhood.

In regard to paragraph 49, related to mega-case No. 07 opened by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace on recruitment and use of children, it is important to note that, to date, 37 former members of the secretariat and the central command structure of the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia have been charged and 15 of them have given voluntary statements. Furthermore, 26 former members of the former Eastern Bloc of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, and 47 former members associated with the former Southern, North-Western, Western, Central Joint Command, Magdalena Medio and Caribbean blocs, have been called upon to give voluntary statements.

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace clarified that as at July 2021, 234 victims had been accredited for participation in the judicial proceedings in the case, and not 274 as stated in the report.

Nevertheless, it is important to state that, as part of the process for providing feedback on the report, the Office of the High Representative received the comments of the Government and corrected the figures on humanitarian demining, which we appreciate.

Such constructive exchanges are, of course, highly positive and would allow for greater precision in the figures and in the use of definitions such as “criminal gangs”, since the actual terms used by Colombia are organized criminal groups and organized armed groups.

In closing, I feel that I must make an observation regarding the presentation of the report’s recommendations, inasmuch as the State is included under the term “the parties”, putting it and criminal groups on an equal footing, thereby empowering the groups and diminishing the figure of a State that has solid institutions, a democratic tradition and a firm commitment to the consolidation of peace and the welfare of its population, which is true of the Colombian State.

Illegal groups such as those mentioned in the report, and in particular the self-styled dissidents of the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and the self-styled Ejército de Liberación Nacional, continue to be included in the list of perpetrators of grave violations of children’s rights. These groups have continued to recruit, use and kill children as part of their illegal activities. The Ejército de Liberación Nacional has consistently refused to take measures to enhance child protection. On the contrary, that illegal armed group has sought to intensify hostilities against the people and Government of Colombia.

The Government is fully aware that, despite its enormous efforts, challenges remain in the struggle against the recruitment and use of children and other forms of violence against children. That is why institutions continue to work to reinforce prevention strategies, and the judicial authorities, to identify and punish those responsible.

In this joint effort, the important support of the United Nations, through the Office of the High Representative and other agencies, is most welcome, valued and appreciated.

We are committed to preventing our children from being used in armed conflict, and we shall not rest as we continue working and making headway in our bid to provide them with comprehensive care.

Our children are the future of sustainable peace.