



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9096th meeting

Tuesday, 19 July 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Simas Magalhães (Brazil)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
India	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland	Mr. Flynn
Kenya	Mr. Kimani
Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493)

Letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/540)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493)

Letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/540)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Morocco, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, the Sudan, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uruguay and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting — and I want to thank them in particular for having accepted the invitation to take part in our debate — Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund; and Mr. Patrick Kumi, Founder and Executive Director of the non-governmental organization Similar Ground.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Thibault Camelli, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance

with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/540, which contains the text of a letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I also wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/493, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter.

Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter: I thank His Excellency the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Ambassador Fernando Simas Magalhães, for convening this debate on the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493), which covers grave violations suffered by children during 2021.

This open debate is an important opportunity for all of us to remind ourselves of the reality faced by children in conflict and of our responsibility to stand by them. The debate also permits us to act on behalf of conflict-affected children by publicly highlighting the current trends and patterns of grave violations against them and allowing Security Council members to hear about existing and emerging challenges, as well as successful measures taken to better protect children. Finally, this open debate is an opportunity to think forward while reaffirming our commitment to the protection of children used and abused by, in and for armed conflict.

The abuses that children were subjected to last year were as grievous as they were many. In South Sudan, for example, children played with what they thought was a toy but that turned out to be a piece of unexploded ordnance. The device detonated, killing three children and wounding another three. In the Philippines, an 11-year-old boy and a 17-year-old girl were recruited and used by the New People's Army. During a military operation, both were arrested together with other members of the group, but due to a lack of available facilities, they could not be immediately reintegrated.

In Somalia, four children travelled to visit family. On the way they were stopped by Al-Shabaab, accused of association with Government forces and abducted. In Afghanistan, as girls' classes were dismissed, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated outside a Kabul high school. Three boys and 42 girls died that day. Another 20 boys and 106 girls were injured in the blast. In Burkina Faso, two girls were abducted and each raped by two armed men. One of the survivors was too scared to accept medical or psychosocial support out of fear of being stigmatized. The examples are endless.

In 2021, in the 21 country situations and one regional monitoring arrangement covered by my mandate, the United Nations verified a total of 23,982 grave violations, with more than 19,165 child victims. Of those children, 1,600 were victims of two or more violations, illustrating how such violations are often interlinked. To put it in perspective, that represents an average of 65 grave violations committed against children every single day of every week of every month of the year. During 2021, 8,000 children were either killed or maimed, making these the most prevalent of all grave violations. The use of explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and landmines had a particularly devastating impact and caused a quarter of those child casualties. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas also critically endangered children.

The recruitment and use of children for, in and by parties to armed conflict, with more than 6,300 verified as recruited and used, was the second most prevalent violation, followed by the denial of humanitarian access to children, with more than 3,900 incidents.

Worryingly, both abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence increased by 20 per cent last year in the various situations covered by the report. We also saw a general rise in attacks on schools and hospitals. Of particular concern is the steady increase in violations against girls, especially through killing and maiming and sexual violence and abduction. Last year, one in three child victims was a girl — barely a year earlier, the proportions were one in four — while 98 per cent of all survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence were girls.

The high numbers of children deprived of their liberty for alleged association with parties to a conflict continued to be a matter of concern last year, when we saw 2,864 children detained or deprived of their liberty and

thereby doubly punished by conflicts that I must stress they were and are not responsible for. We also verified an increase in the military use of schools, denying children the safe spaces they need to learn, receive life-saving assistance and develop. As a result, thousands of children have experienced long-term negative consequences for their development and well-being.

Various peace and security challenges put children at risk during 2021, from the devastating impact of violent extremism in the central Sahel and Lake Chad basin regions to the dire security situation in the Horn of Africa. Those challenges include everything from escalating humanitarian crises and disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law to the climate emergency, and from a series of coups to the continued negative impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on conflict-affected children. We must not forget that the pandemic is still ongoing and that the United Nations continues to see challenges to and delays in its monitoring and reporting of grave violations. Compared to previous years, that has resulted in higher numbers than usual of late-verified violations in this year's report. It has also slowed the implementation of agreed joint action plans and other measures put in place in a number of situations to improve the protection of children. Additionally, the severity of the armed violence, conflict and war in places such as Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine has led the Secretary-General to include those situations on the agenda for children and armed conflict, prompting the immediate commencement of monitoring to report on those situations by 2023.

Although the tragic circumstances for children that I have just described are very serious, we should not be discouraged. Hand in hand with tragedy, we also witnessed signs of hope and recovery in 2021. In that regard, I hope Council members will join me in saluting the unwavering dedication of the child-protection actors and partners on the ground, who often work in extremely challenging and dangerous circumstances and whose numbers are constantly being depleted. They do it because they know that sometimes they are the only champions whom children have on the ground. We should also recognize those parties to conflict that have paused to reflect on ways in which children can be better protected by working closely with the United Nations to that end. They too are recognized in this year's report.

Hope came in many forms during 2021, and I will highlight only some of those positive actions. For example, 17 joint action plans with parties to conflict are currently being implemented, including three that were signed in 2021, two in Mali with platform groups and one in Yemen with the Houthis. Together, my Office and the child-protection teams on the ground are also successfully engaging with other listed parties to adopt action plans in situations such as Iraq and Syria. Altogether, 40 new commitments and agreed measures were put in place by parties to conflicts last year alone.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, six commanders signed unilateral commitments to protecting children following United Nations advocacy. In Syria, accountability measures against Syrian Democratic Forces personnel for violating commitments under their action plan were adopted. In the Philippines, the armed forces signed a strategic plan to prevent and respond to grave violations of children's rights. Iraq has facilitated the repatriation of some 223 children to their countries of origin at their request. In South Sudan, a national conference on children and armed conflict was held in May. I attended the event in Juba and was able to engage with Government partners and a diverse group of partners who all committed to launching a push to improve the protection of children.

The release and reintegration of children is one of the most concrete outcomes of our shared work. More than 12,200 children were released from armed groups and forces last year, often in the wake of United Nations advocacy. That number has remained steady over the past five years, which is a great accomplishment. In addition, progress has been made regarding analysis, policy development and partnerships, as well as on prevention mechanisms, as highlighted in resolution 2427 (2018). In India, for example, prevention has led to a deepening of our already fruitful cooperation with the Government on enhancing child-protection systems. We have also increased our cooperation with regional organizations, including the African Union, the League of Arab States and the European Union.

Regarding the pursuit of a better understanding of the problems children face, we also identified the need to further examine the gender dimensions of violations against children, leading to the publication of a study by my Office in May, *The Gender Dimensions of Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict*, which I invite the Council to consult.

Yesterday, for example, I also launched a guidance note on the violation of abduction, which is particularly relevant, considering the increase in the number of those violations and the need expressed by monitors to better understand how to implement their monitoring and reporting obligations.

Last year, we also researched and published studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on grave violations against children in armed conflict, as well as a report consolidating the results of the four regional consultations, which were conducted with United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting, their equivalents in non-Monitor and Reporting Mechanism situations and regional offices of United Nations entities, as well as UNICEF, to identify challenges and collect lessons learned to better strengthen the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of grave violations against children and engagement with parties to conflict.

Our efforts during 2021 also continued to ensure that child protection remain central to peace processes. To that end, we have trained mediators and diplomats, including for the League of Arab States, using the Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, which the Secretary-General launched in 2020.

The report outlines a series of recommendations by the Secretary-General, which I encourage all members to consult in depth. Allow me to highlight a few of them today.

First, it is vital that United Nations operations on the ground be adequately mandated, staffed and funded to continue carrying out monitoring and reporting, engaging with parties, developing joint action plans, providing technical assistance to signatories for implementation purposes and undertaking many other often life-saving interventions, including securing the release of children from conflict. Without child protection advocacy and work undertaken on the ground and by my Office, the situation would surely be worse.

Secondly, humanitarian spaces must always be safeguarded, and parties to conflict must allow safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to all children, while also ensuring the safety of humanitarian personnel and assets. Of critical importance, hospitals and schools must always remain safe spaces, and they should always be protected.

Thirdly, sustainable financial support and technical assistance for timely, gender-, age- and disability-sensitive, survivor-centred and inclusive reintegration programmes for children, including for the survivors of sexual violence, are critical for breaking cycles of violence and allowing child survivors a second chance at a constructive life. In addition, we must continue to promote best practices and develop essential tools to consistently evolve in our work. In that regard, I thank our wide network of partners for their continuous cooperation as we seek to enlarge and deepen our analytical capacity to better serve children.

Children affected by conflict need our support — and they need it now. There is much we can do. For example, given the devastating impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war on children long after conflict ceases, it is critical for the international community to urgently step up support for mine action, including to increase child-sensitive data collection and assistance programmes. All parties to conflict must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law while conducting military and armed operations. Furthermore, they must ensure that the perpetrators of grave violations are held accountable.

There are many other actions that Member States can undertake to support prevention, including signing, ratifying and implementing relevant international instruments and commitments to protect children from hostilities, while preventing violations against them. For those reasons, it is important to prioritize children's rights and needs as central to conflict prevention, early warning, mediation and peace processes, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration initiatives, security sector reform and other crucial peace and security tools in the nexus between peace, conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

In conclusion, as we gear up to strengthening the protection of children so that we can stop their use and abuse in, for and by armed conflict, it is fitting to end this statement with a stark fact. The best way to protect children and prevent violations against them in situations of armed conflict is to promote and champion peace. Let us strive to do so, for their sake.

The President: I thank Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Russell.

Ms. Russell: I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to join today's critical open debate on children and armed conflict. I am truly honoured to be here and to follow my friend Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, who has done such an extraordinary job.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2022/493) leaves little to the imagination. Around the world, as conflicts proliferate, grave violations against children continue. Children and childhood are under attack. I would like to pause and take a moment to reflect on just how appalling the information in the Secretary-General's report really is.

The report presents verified evidence of more than 23,000 violations against 19,165 children in 2021. Some of those children were killed. Some were grievously injured. Some were raped. Some suffered multiple violations. They were abducted from their families, ripped from their schools and forced to take up arms and risk their lives. Those are only the violations against children that the United Nations has been able to verify; there are many others we could not reach and whose stories may never be known to us.

The world has failed them. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter has said, there is no word strong enough to describe the horrific experiences those children have suffered. I recently met a young boy at a camp for displaced people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He had fled there to escape brutal violence in his home village. That young child had seen his best friend beheaded in front of him. I have never seen such a sad, haunted child.

On the same visit, I met a young girl. When the armed men came to her village, she and her sister faced an impossible choice — serve the group or die. In truth, it was no choice at all. She and her sister were abducted, raped and abused. Her sister died one week after they were abducted. By the time I met her, she had already given birth to a child shortly after she had escaped.

Those are only two children. There are many more. This year we have three new situations added to the report. There are three more conflicts in which children are being forced to bear the brunt of wars waged by adults. UNICEF calls on all parties to those most recent conflicts to take action to protect children now. The United Nations is here to support any party to conflict that is willing to take measures to better protect children.

The report paints a grim picture, but the purpose of the report is not only to point the finger but also to point the way forward. Eight situations of concern have been removed completely from the report over the years because they have succeeded in ending grave violations against children.

In 2021 alone, at least 12,214 children were released from armed forces and armed groups, thereby bringing the total number of children who are documented to have been released since 2000 to more than 186,000 girls and boys. New action plans have been signed in Mali and Yemen, and 21 action plans are currently under implementation. That is progress. Crucially, United Nations monitoring and reporting activities on grave violations have grown stronger and more robust.

The data reflected in the Secretary-General's report this year are as strong as ever before. The United Nations stands behind that data. I would like to take a moment to commend the work of the United Nations teams that collect and verify that information.

We are committed to doing that work in accordance with humanitarian principles — humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. We need Member States to grant us the space to do so. We remain as committed to this vital agenda as when it was launched. To our collective shame, more than 25 years later, the agenda is still necessary.

Member States have enormous power to drive progress to protect children. Respectfully but urgently, we call on them to do more. Yes, of course, they must insist on compliance with international humanitarian law, but we also request that they go beyond the requirements of the law. They have the power to issue military orders with zero-tolerance policies on grave violations against children. We would ask them to please use that power. They should endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration to protect children and schools from attack and misuse by parties to conflict, and the Paris Principles to demobilize and reintegrate children who have been used by armed forces and groups. We call on them to use their influence to push States and non-State armed groups to prevent and end grave violations against children and to protect children who have survived grave violations from stigma and revictimization. That includes stopping the detention of children who have been forced to serve armed groups and ending the denial of their right to citizenship, no matter which groups they have been associated with. Finally,

we are counting on them to support United Nations efforts to implement the children and armed conflict agenda on the ground, both through the allocation of resources and a commitment to working with us to protect, strengthen and stand behind that agenda.

Every child has a right to be protected in times of war and times of peace. Fulfilling that right is not an option but a sacred obligation, reflecting our most deeply human duty to safeguard the next generation and build a more sustainable future for everyone. Ms. Graça Machel famously said that protecting children from the impact of armed conflict is everyone's responsibility and must be everyone's concern. I thank the members of the Security Council for making that responsibility their own, and I thank you once again for inviting me to speak today, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Ms. Russell for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kumi.

Mr. Kumi: I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations for the invitation to address the Member States, and Member States for their willingness to listen.

My name is Patrick, and I would like to say a little bit about myself and propose a few recommendations that I think will work if we join together. I would like to ask everyone here to listen, and I know everyone will.

In 2016, I was 15 years old. I lived with my family in a village far from the terrorism in South Sudan. One day, I went to work on our farm with my father. Unfortunately, an armed group came and abducted us. They took us far away from our home and village. They tortured us and claimed that my father had a gun. They forced us to sleep in a pit filled with water that came up to our necks and beat us continually. Because my father could not confess to something he had not done, they shot him dead in front of me. I was then told to join the group or die. I cannot remember what I said. I only realized that I had answered yes when I found myself in the centre of a camp where hundreds of other children were congregated. I could not eat for days or stop crying. There were more than 2,000 people in the barracks, half of them children, and many of them carrying guns. I was shocked and speechless. I learned from the few I spoke to that some of the children had joined because they were offered money and promised higher-level positions. Some joined because their families had been killed and they wanted revenge. A 10-year-old boy

told me that his parents were mistreating him and he could no longer bear living with them. Other young children had wives, and even some adults had married children 14 or 15 years old. In every attack I was forced to participate in, at least five children were injured or killed. There was no medical care. When you were sick, you either died or survived. We drank the same water as the animals.

One day Government forces attacked our barracks. There was shooting on every side. It was chaos. I ran. I narrowly escaped death. I kept going and found my way to Uganda, where I was registered as a refugee in the Bidi Bidi refugee camp. It took me 11 months to find my family. When I finally did, it was a day of joy, happiness and sorrow.

In 2018, I joined the War Child programme known as VoiceMore, a youth-advocacy programme. I went through training and ran a project for orphans and separated children, together with other young people in my area. After the programme, together with friends, we set up our own community-based organization, Similar Ground, through which we are helping hundreds of children recover from stress and trauma. We are also running awareness campaigns for young people. It means a lot to us to help hundreds of children recover from their traumatic experiences and help other young people play a greater role in their community. This year I enrolled in a degree programme in human rights, peace and humanitarian response. I lost three years of my life trying to recover, and many children in my community are not able to recover as fast. Some never recover at all. Mine is just one story, but we know that there are thousands of children currently going through what I went through. I have given a lot of thought over the years to what would have helped a child like me. Based on my experience and my work with other children, I would like to propose four recommendations.

The first is establishing better-quality reintegration that really understands children. Children leaving armed groups need our full support to heal. They need medical care. They need to be reunited with their families and given opportunities to learn. Most importantly, their communities need to be supported in welcoming them. The children who leave armed groups are seen as a threat, and more work needs to be done to help people understand their needs and what they have been through. In addition, there is a gap in opportunities for children and young people who leave

such armed forces. They need to learn new skills and how to put them to good use.

Secondly, we all know that billions of dollars are spent every year in humanitarian aid, but that there is no overall sustainability. In the humanitarian response we give money. Projects are implemented and then come to an end. National and international organizations should improve their collaboration with Governments and national and local organizations so that when projects are finished, the community and the Government can take over. I would also like to ask that longer-term funding be made available for projects and local organizations and community groups, including young people, so that the young people themselves can lead them. International non-governmental organizations play an important role, but eventually they all leave, whereas we know our own issues very well and we can make activities more sustainable.

Thirdly, we need to enable greater participation in decision-making for people like me, children and youth. It is great that I am able to speak here today, and I am grateful for the opportunity. But one young person once a year is not enough. Young people affected by conflict need more opportunity to participate in policy and programming that is about them. Children affected by conflict will soon grow into adults, and many will be ready to be part of the solution. That will improve the situation in the longer term. There should be more opportunities for the participation and empowerment of young people in the United Nations system and in designing and leading responses.

Finally, there should be greater accountability. There are many laws already in place that are supposed to protect children affected by conflict, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Conventions and the many Security Council resolutions. Many countries agreed to those laws, but they are not respected. They are not enforced as they are supposed to be at the country or regional levels. There should be more accountability for the promises and commitments made. There should be more effort to ensure that militaries, armed groups, local government and anyone who meets a child in a conflict zone know and understand those laws, while those who break them need to be held accountable.

Last week, I sat down with friends and colleagues in Bidi Bidi, and I asked them what was the most important thing that I should request of the Security

Council. They all agreed on the participation of young people and children in policy and programming. If it is something meant for children and young people, then let it be for them.

I would like to finish by thanking my friends and collaborators at Similar Ground, War Child and other people and organizations that have helped me in my journey. I thank the members of the Security Council for what they will do to better help children in conflict.

The President: I thank Mr. Kumi very much for sharing with us his experiences and for the recommendations that he brought to our attention, which, I am sure, will be important in guiding our work in the future.

I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the Deputy Foreign Minister of Brazil.

Once again, I want to thank all participants for the opportunity to share this important debate. Let me thank the Secretary-General for his latest annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493). I also commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, for her commitment and continued efforts in engaging with parties in conflict-affected countries to protect children. I thank her for the observations that she made this morning, as well. I would also like to thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, for her tireless and dedicated work. Furthermore, I again thank Mr. Patrick Kumi for his moving and inspirational testimony to the Security Council.

In the past 25 years, the United Nations has made valuable progress in protecting children from the scourge of war. This year's report alone shows that more than 12,000 children were released from armed groups and armed forces in 2021. Despite our efforts to date, there is still a long road ahead of us. Children remain subject to the six grave violations as a result of the failure of parties in armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law.

Some of those children were disproportionately vulnerable, such as refugee, internally displaced and stateless children. Displacement poses additional risks for children's safety, including vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation, especially for those children who are unaccompanied or have been separated from their parents or caregivers. Displaced children

also face barriers to accessing basic services, such as education and health care. That situation imposes serious limitations on the development of children and increases the risk of additional grave violations.

Neighbouring, transit and host countries must ensure that children arriving in their territories are immediately identified and have full access to all public services and social benefits, regardless of their migration status. Such services should include access to education, in accordance with last year's resolution 2601 (2021). Brazil has been providing access to education and health care, among other services and benefits, for children fleeing countries such as Afghanistan, Haiti, Syria and Venezuela. Children always deserve our support, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, migration or any other status.

A concerning trend shown in this year's report is the increase in abduction by more than 20 per cent as compared to 2020 — one of the fastest-growing grave violations. Boys and girls are both at risk of abduction. Boys who suffer abduction are also usually subject to recruitment. Abducted girls are likely to suffer violations such as sexual violence, forced marriage and exploitation. Boys and girls often require different types of support before, during and after conflict.

Prevention efforts and the protection of children against grave violations should be a priority for the international community, and so should reintegration, which is essential to helping children rebuild their lives. When released, they often face exclusion, stigma and a lack of opportunities. A world that abandons its children has no future; it inspires neither faith nor hope. Reintegration must be seen as a third pillar of the children and armed conflict agenda, complementing the efforts of prevention and protection. Reintegration must be understood as a long-term process that requires a long-term commitment. It should also be seen as a tool for peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

We encourage the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to engage with parties in conflict with a view to establishing specific action plans on reintegration, in which the relevant communities, partners and donors could be linked into a single solidarity network. In doing so, we also encourage the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to make full use of the expertise of the Peacebuilding Commission, which is

uniquely positioned to bridge cross-pillar discussions, such as the one that we are suggesting here.

I also want to share a few words on four key points for the effective implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda.

First, accountability is essential in ending grave violations. Brazil agrees with the call in the Secretary-General's report for Member States to adopt national accountability measures and to cooperate with the relevant international accountability mechanisms.

Secondly, any counter-terrorism action must abide by international law. If counter-terrorism takes place at the expense of our children, it will have defeated its purpose. Children should always be treated primarily as victims, including those associated with groups designated as terrorists, and they should only be detained as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate time.

Thirdly, the Security Council should ensure that sanctions do not have adverse humanitarian consequences for civilian populations, including children, or adversely affect activities carried out by humanitarian organizations. We encourage it to continue improving humanitarian carveouts in sanction regimes and to consider the inclusion of child rights experts in the monitoring mechanisms of sanctions committees, including panels and expert work.

Fourthly, Brazil agrees with the Secretary-General's report on the importance of ensuring that child protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

In conclusion, it is Brazil's belief that children can continue to bring the Members of this Organization together. While recognizing that the Security Council is divided on a complex range of issues, protecting children from war should be one common denominator for us. As stated in the Graça Machel report:

"In a world of diversity and disparity, children are a unifying force capable of bringing people to common ethical grounds." (*A/51/306, para. 6*)

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank the President for hosting this year's annual debate on children and armed conflict. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter, Executive Director Russell and Mr. Patrick Kumi for their powerful briefings.

In the past year, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in political instability, military takeovers and coups. We have seen violent flare-ups and unprovoked military aggression, and the annual report for 2021 (S/2022/493) shows that, despite existing legal obligations and normative frameworks aimed at protecting children, the number of verified grave violations remains alarmingly high. The report presents a highly uncomfortable, but unquestionable truth: that children pay the highest price of war.

In Myanmar, the United Nations recently reported that the military has killed at least 142 children, more than a quarter of a million children have been displaced, and over 1,400 arbitrarily have been detained. These children are highly vulnerable to further violations and abuses of international law. We are also deeply troubled by the reported targeting of girls' schools in the Lake Chad basin region and in Afghanistan. The Afghan de facto authorities' denial of girls' rights to education is unacceptable. Russia's illegal war on Ukraine is also causing immense harm, death and an uncertain future for millions of children. Many have been forced to flee their homes. Countries that receive unaccompanied or separated children must ensure that they are immediately identified and registered, and that adequate protection and support are provided.

Against this troubling backdrop, allow me to highlight a few actions we should be taking to advance the agenda. First, we must have the facts and data in order to respond adequately. United Nations country teams and partners have proven to be adaptable, monitoring and reporting on violations in challenging environments. And the addition of four new situations of concern in this year's report is an important step towards advancing country-level progress to protect children. But we must do more to secure the necessary funding, also with follow-up in the Fifth Committee.

Secondly, as we know, prevention is better than cure. We must take concrete measures to prevent violations and abuses against children. We call on all parties to conflict to sign and implement action plans with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and

on Member States to endorse and implement the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles as well as the Safe School Declaration. Effective implementation of resolution 2601 (2021) is also key.

Thirdly, children must be treated as children. This applies to all children, including those associated with armed groups, even those designated as terrorist groups. We urge Member States to treat all children involved primarily as victims of violations of international law. Societies cannot build sustainable peace without the effective and sustainable reintegration of children. Moreover, the imprisonment of children should happen only as a measure of last resort, and for the shortest appropriate period of time. First and foremost, non-judicial measures should be sought.

Finally, accountability must be secured. All Member States must bring to justice those responsible for violations of international law, including through cooperation with international justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court. The integrity and independence of the Special Representative to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children is instrumental. All parties to conflict must be held to the same transparent standards, including through the listing and de-listing criteria.

Children living in conflict have no time to lose. Their childhood and our common future are at stake. As Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Norway remains committed. Let us act now to ensure a better life for the millions of children living in armed conflict.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): In the words of my illustrious compatriot and former Secretary-General Busumuru Kofi Annan:

“We were all children once. And we all share the desire for the well-being of our children, which has always been and will continue to be the most universally cherished aspiration of humankind.”

Today, as we meet in the Security Council Chamber, united by our collective aspiration to protect children and ensure their well-being, Ghana wishes to express appreciation to Brazil for convening this high-level open debate on children and armed conflict. Finding ways to protect children from the harsh daily reality they face growing up in communities ravaged by armed conflict is the singular most important responsibility we can exercise to defend the defenceless and most

vulnerable. In that regard, let me express appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and Executive Director Catherine Russell for their rich perspectives, as well as Mr. Patrick Kumi, for his deeply moving story, which rightly points us to the need for action on the commitments and promises we have all made as an international community to the world’s children.

Earlier this year, as Ghana joined in the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandates, we were encouraged by the outcomes that the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF and others have achieved over the last two decades, including the successful release of hundreds of thousands of children from the custody of armed groups and their reintegration into society, the development and implementation of action plans by parties to conflict and the provision of services to survivors and affected families. These outcomes inspire hope in existing capabilities to ensure child safety.

We nonetheless remain concerned by the fact that many more children in conflict environments are currently being subjected to all the six grave violations against children, especially killing and maiming, including through explosive remnants of war antipersonnel landmines and improvised explosive devices, recruitment and use, and the denial of humanitarian access by a plethora of actors who operate within an atmosphere of impunity and social dysfunction who take pride in perpetrating the most heinous attacks against children as a weapon of war. For child refugees, internally displaced and stateless children, the horrors of armed conflict are even more distressing, as their lack of a home, family or even citizenship heightens their vulnerability to extreme violence and abuse. The arbitrary detentions and mistreatment of children associated or allegedly associated with armed groups are a prevalent feature of many armed conflicts which must be tackled through the prioritization of both global and national child-release and child-reintegration mechanisms. The gut-wrenching images we see and the disheartening stories we often hear within the Security Council in relation to the plight of children in situations of armed conflict must propel our righteous anger and repugnance towards the consolidation of our culture of robust action.

In today’s open debate, in addition to Ghana’s alignment with the statements to be read by the Friends

of the Responsibility to Protect and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, we would like to highlight four key messages on how the United Nations and its Member States can further enhance the protection of children in conflict contexts. First, an indication of the level of importance we attach to their children and armed conflict agenda is reflected by the resources we devote in support of its implementation. We therefore urge full support for the location of targeted, practical and rapid resources to facilitate responses to threats against children or avert potential dangers they may face. Such resources provide, among other things, safe accommodation and enhanced protection of displaced refugee and stateless children from the six grave violations.

However, there is an urgent need for targeted resources and collaborative efforts by the international community and Member States to sensitize communities on explosive-ordnance risk as well as to ensure the identification, fencing off and eventual destruction of all manner of explosive ordnance that could endanger the lives of children.

Secondly, United Nations regional organizations and Member States should mainstream child protection into all efforts and discussions on conflict, including conflict prevention, mediation, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

Peacekeeping missions need to ensure the integration of child-protection obligations into mission-planning policies, decisions and activities and include child-protection focal points in their peacekeeping and field operations.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need to ensure that children associated with armed or terrorist groups are not treated as criminals but, rather, as victims. With the support of the United Nations, States that require capacity should be assisted to put in place standard operating procedures for the rapid handover of such children to the relevant civilian child-protection actors and their integration into society, in accordance with resolution 2427 (2018) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, among other instruments.

Finally, in view of the importance of child education, we strongly condemn the military use of schools as well as all attacks against schools and educational facilities. Member States have a responsibility to establish and strictly enforce laws that criminalize attacks against schools as well as to ensure

the continuation, re-establishment and preservation of education during armed conflict, in line with the Safe Schools Declaration.

We call for that commitment to be upheld by all and reiterate that all parties to conflict need to respect the civilian character of schools in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate that while significant strides have been made globally in raising awareness and protecting children affected by armed conflict, there are still many more miles to travel in enhancing international collaboration to protect children in conflict. Ghana is committed to travelling those extra miles for the cause of protecting such children and securing their safe and sustainable future.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and Executive Director Russell for their briefings. I thank Mr. Kumi for sharing his experiences and insights; it is very important for us to hear them. I also thank Brazil for hosting this very important debate.

This year's annual children and armed conflict report (S/2022/493) provides a sobering snapshot of how conflict impacts children. In Ethiopia, thousands of children have been forced from their homes, separated from their families and subjected to sexual violence. We are encouraged by the humanitarian truce in northern Ethiopia and hope that all parties will build on that momentum to advance talks that achieve a durable ceasefire.

The conflict in Yemen caused enormous suffering for children, including the denial of humanitarian access, and resulted in children being killed, maimed, subject to sexual violence, recruited and used in the conflict. We welcome the truce in Yemen, which provides respite to all Yemenis, including children, and continue to support the United Nations engagement with the parties to the conflict to protect children and prevent violations against them.

The situation in Myanmar is causing increasing concern. On a single day in Kayah state last December, the Myanmar military massacred at least 35 people, including children and two staff members of Save the Children, and then burned their bodies. According to a doctor who examined the remains, almost every victim's skull was fractured. It is beyond comprehension that amid such brutality, some in the international

community continue to provide the Myanmar military with the lethal tools that enable its campaign of violence and repression. The sale of arms and dual-use technology to the military must end now.

Russia's war against Ukraine has added another dark chapter in the assault on children. Children in Ukraine are increasingly in danger as Russia's forces strike a growing number of hospitals and schools. Russia's forces reportedly have forcibly deported more than a million Ukrainian civilians to Russia via processing through so-called filtration, including more than 260,000 children. Meanwhile, Russia's Commissioner for Children's Rights touts new efforts by the Kremlin to fast-track the adoption of children from Ukraine within Russia.

We commend the Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter for listing Ukraine, Mozambique and Ethiopia as situations of concern in the annual children and armed conflict report. That action importantly highlights the ongoing violations and abuses against children that are taking place.

In 2021, violent attacks on schoolchildren in Afghanistan, particularly girls, hindered access to education. In 2022, armed groups and Government forces may no longer be using school buildings for military purposes, but there has been no peace dividend for Afghan girls, who have been barred from enrolling in secondary schools. Every Afghan child has an equal right to access education, no matter who they are.

The Security Council has been clear and unanimous. If the Taliban wants to normalize its relations with the international community, schools need to be open for all female students without further delay.

It is clear that we have not done enough to protect children from the impact of conflict. The United States remains firmly committed to the children and armed conflict agenda and is keen to see it elevated, enhanced and better integrated into all of the Security Council's work.

At the national level, violations against children must be criminalized in national laws. We call on all Member States to adopt national accountability measures so as to hold perpetrators accountable.

At the international level, the Council must ensure that all United Nations peace operations and political

missions have adequate child-protection capacity, with the prioritization of child protection during transition.

Moreover, building on Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter's comments on the need for safe humanitarian spaces this morning, we call on her to develop a guidance note on the denial of humanitarian access for children, in line with guidance notes for other violations. We demand that all parties to conflict allow and facilitate unimpeded, rapid and safe access to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations, especially children.

This is not a matter of protecting a small subset of the global population. When we take steps to protect children, we are protecting and safeguarding our collective future and actively taking steps to end enduring conflicts. Protecting children is a critical element of maintaining international peace and security.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Brazil for having organized this debate. I also thank Ms. Russell and Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter for their briefings, and I commend the poignant statement made by Mr. Kumi in his capacity as a survivor. Through him, I pay tribute to all those involved in protecting children during conflict.

France commends the ongoing efforts of the whole of the United Nations system to free children from war. With more than 150,000 children freed since 2005, the children and armed conflict agenda represents what the Council does best when circumstances require. However, we can and must do more. Violations continue as conflicts multiply, increasing the vulnerability of children. Violations committed by regular forces are also on the rise.

In that connection, France once again condemns the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the consequences of which are dramatic when it comes to children. The mechanisms at the Security Council's disposal must be brought into play without delay — if necessary, through more frequent reports when the situation is urgent. Murders and mutilations and attacks against schools and hospitals must be recorded and attributed immediately. The credibility of the United Nations and the Council's sanctions list is at stake.

France is also concerned about the situations in Somalia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria and Yemen. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations to establish

dialogue with the parties and promote the signing of action plans.

In the face of those worrisome trends, I would like to highlight three points.

First, the fight against grave violations must not end with the release of children. Their reintegration into society is fundamental, while re-recruitment represents an unforgivable failure. The Paris Principles and the Paris Commitments address the dual objective of releasing child soldiers and reintegrating them into civilian life. Since 2007, 112 States have endorsed those Principles and Commitments — we reiterate our call for their universal endorsement.

Secondly, we must redouble our efforts to protect refugee and internally displaced children, who are among the most vulnerable. France welcomes the work of UNICEF and humanitarian actors. Access to education is a major issue, which is why France has worked, for example, towards the immediate enrolment in schools of more than 18,000 Ukrainian refugee children.

We also welcome the emphasis placed today on the situation of stateless children. Laws preventing mothers from passing on their nationality must be repealed, and universal birth registration must be guaranteed. All children must be able to enjoy their rights equally.

Thirdly and finally, we must continue to fight relentlessly against impunity. France commends the role of the United Nations and all actors who are committed to child protection. We must also make greater use of sanctions as a tool to complement legal proceedings.

Rest assured that France will continue its historic commitment to the protection of children in conflict.

Mr. Ragutthalli (India): Let me begin by thanking Brazil for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. We also thank His Excellency the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Ambassador Fernando Simas Magalhães, for presiding over today's meeting. We welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the UNICEF Executive Director, Ms. Catherine Russell, and thank them for their respective briefings. We also thank Mr. Patrick Kumi for his moving account and his recommendations.

Children are the most critical stakeholders for our future, hence the need to protect, nurture and empower

them. The best interests of the child should be at the forefront of all our endeavours. Mahatma Gandhi once said: "If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children". However, children continue to suffer disproportionately in most situations of armed conflict around the world. They remain most susceptible to suffering and are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of armed conflict.

Over the past two decades, the Security Council has actively engaged to protect children in situations of armed conflict. While significant progress has been achieved, grave violations against children continue to persist, while the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic has further magnified the risks that children face. It is therefore important for Member States to focus on child protection measures in their pandemic response and recovery plans as well.

As noted by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2022/493), the scale and severity of violations perpetrated against children in armed conflict are still on the rise. It is clear that there remain significant challenges to the effective implementation of that mandate. The international community has the responsibility — and indeed the obligation — to do its utmost to provide support to children affected by armed conflict without any discrimination.

We appreciate the engagement of the United Nations, particularly the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, with parties to armed conflicts, which has resulted in the release of 12,214 children over the past year alone.

National Governments have the primary responsibility to protect the rights of the child, as mandated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Security Council must do everything it can to support Governments' efforts in that regard. We also encourage Member States to ratify the Convention's Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Member States need to support effective legal frameworks for the protection and promotion of children's rights. It is important to build an enabling and conducive environment to ensure the holistic development of the child, with a special focus on nutrition, education and safety. Children who grow up in conflict and post-conflict situations often need

a fresh start. Support for national Governments in strengthening legal and operational tools for child protection is important in that context.

We stress the need to end impunity for all actors inciting and perpetrating grave violations against children in armed conflict situations. It is vital that Member States develop comprehensive legal frameworks in line with international standards in order to ensure the effective prosecution of child-related crimes. National Governments have the primary responsibility to prosecute and deter such crimes in conflict situations on their territories, even if such crimes are alleged to have been committed by non-State actors. Where required, the United Nations could assist Member States in augmenting their capacities to deal with that issue.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the obligation of States parties to promote the rehabilitation and social integration of children affected by armed conflict in an environment that fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child. Close cooperation between the United Nations and its Member States is critical for developing an effective and sustainable policy for the repatriation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. Member States need to work towards an inclusive approach to providing protection to child victims during the rehabilitation and reintegration process in post-conflict situations.

A dangerous and worrisome trend in global terrorism is the rising number of children that are recruited and involved in terror-related activities. For terror groups, children are most susceptible to manipulation, whether as active participants or as human shields to protect the perpetrators of terror. School closures due to the pandemic have been misused by those terrorist groups to target children, including through online avenues, for their radicalization and indoctrination in violent extremist ideologies. There is an urgent need for a more coordinated approach to implementing the child protection and counter-terrorism agenda. Member States need to demonstrate greater political will to hold the perpetrators of terrorism and their sponsors to account, as well as to fulfil the Council's child protection obligations.

The report of the Secretary General mentions that more than 25 per cent of child casualties were caused by mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and explosive remnants of war. It is a matter

of deep concern that terrorist groups have resorted to landmines and IEDs as low-cost and effective options for spreading terror and threatening innocent civilians, including children. The use of such devices has only increased, hence the need to strongly condemn and take effective measures to combat that trend. India supports the efforts of the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme and other agencies that have been working in conflict zones across the world.

We recognize the importance of having sufficient resources and the requisite number of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions for the effective implementation of child protection programmes. The Council should consider incorporating adequate child protection provisions and capacities in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations. There is also a greater need for constructive engagement with respective national Governments in the formulation and implementation of child protection action plans, which are integral in order to sustain durable peace.

We also note with concern that, despite the Council's clear mandate, the Secretary-General's report includes situations that are not situations of armed conflict or threats to the maintenance of international peace and security. We must be cautious, as attempts to selectively expand the mandate will only politicize its agenda. It would distract us and even divert our attention from real threats to international peace and security and children in armed conflict.

In conclusion, let me reiterate India's firm commitment and steadfast support to the United Nations in all its endeavours to protect children in armed conflict.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the delegation of Brazil for convening today's important debate and for keeping the children and armed conflict agenda a priority for the Security Council. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the efforts of Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and her Office to enhance the protection of children in conflict zones around the world. In that context, we want to express our deep concern about the number of grave violations committed against

children, the majority of them by non-State armed groups, including terrorist groups such as the Houthis, the Al-Shabaab movement and the Da'esh organization. I am also grateful to Ms. Russell for her comprehensive briefing and to Mr. Kumi for participating in today's meeting. In the light of the commitment of the United Arab Emirates to the protection of children in armed conflict, pursuant to international law and the existing Security Council frameworks, we would like to highlight three important issues.

First, we should encourage and support multi-stakeholder mechanisms dedicated to the protection and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict so as to ensure a whole-of-society approach and set up integrated programmes that will support peacebuilding efforts while facilitating the necessary and sustainable funding needed for programmes that focus on survivors and take gender perspectives into consideration. As we heard today from Mr. Kumi, it is essential that all peacebuilding efforts incorporate the needs of those children in order to ensure their reintegration into society and enable them to build a hopeful future.

Secondly, we should continue to address the abduction of children in conflict zones. According to the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2022/493), in 2021 verified cases of such incidents increased by 20 per cent over the previous year, despite the fact that grave violations are severely underreported. We must also accelerate age- and sex-disaggregated data collection, which can help us acquire a better understanding of how different stages of conflicts can affect boys and girls and can assist relevant actors, such as regional organizations, in developing better strategies for information-sharing, as well as monitoring and reporting, especially for grave cross-border violations.

Thirdly, as we are seeing the numbers of forcibly displaced persons reach unprecedented levels, it is crucial that the Council maintain its focus on the specific needs of displaced children, including by integrating their protection into the mandates of peace operations. The right of those children to have access to essential services such as psychological and physical health care must be ensured. We underscore that children displaced by armed conflict have the same fundamental right to education as any other child. That education should be inclusive, responsive to their needs and tailored to their well-being, cultural background and language preference.

As we have previously underscored, an effective commitment to the protection of children requires preventing outbreaks of conflict in the first place. Regrettably, the situation of children continues to deteriorate and is directly linked to the growing armed conflicts spreading around the world. The Security Council must work to uphold its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security by ending and preventing conflicts, and the United Arab Emirates will continue to cooperate in and support every effort to achieve those objectives.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I commend you, Mr. President, for convening today's important debate. I also thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Catherine Russell, UNICEF Executive Director, and Mr. Patrick Kumi for their briefings. Kenya welcomes this opportunity to consider the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2022/493) and further efforts needed to protect children from armed conflict. Today we would like to draw the Council's attention to four recommendations.

First, an immediate measure the Security Council should take is to incorporate child-protection provisions and capabilities into all mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions. The elements to be included are early warning, the protection of civilians, transitional justice and disarmament, counter-radicalization and -recruitment and disengagement, demobilization and reintegration.

Secondly, the harm that terrorist groups do to children requires the Security Council's urgent attention. Kenya condemns the grave violations committed against children during armed conflict. We note with concern the extraordinarily high incidence of such crimes committed by terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab, Da'esh and the Houthis, which conduct mass abductions as part of their recruitment. Children are kidnapped from their homes and schools, trafficked or forcibly married to terrorists and subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence.

The process of radicalization is itself gravely damaging to children, leading them to take hateful and violent actions that directly harm them, their families and the public in general. The psychological dimensions of radicalization need further attention from clinical psychology experts and should be considered from a child-safety and well-being perspective. It should

be noted by the Security Council and States that the ability of Al-Shabaab, Da'esh and the Houthis to control territory and the populations within it is key to the harm they do to children. As such, the Council should agree that military and police pressure on such groups, to the extent that they struggle to control territory, is integral to the protection of children. It is also important to recall the periodic attacks on educational institutions by groups such as Al-Shabaab. Their rejection of education, as well as their assaults on schools, is proof that they should not be considered normal political actors or legitimate targets for dialogue and negotiations.

A key takeaway for the Council is that attempts to negotiate with terrorist groups should be supported only if the groups disavow their ideological aims justifying attacks on children and civilians at large. With those observations in mind, Kenya calls for a more robust and consistent counter-terrorism regime to protect children. Al-Shabaab must be treated as such and be placed under the most comprehensive counter-terrorism sanctions regime to protect children from its violations. We note the concern in the Secretary General's report about the impact of counter-terrorism measures on children. However, given our prior observations, which are recognized in the Secretary-General's report, we believe that competent, human-rights-sensitive and effective counter-terrorism is a key tool in the protection of children.

Thirdly, children are often the victims of explosive ordnance deployed by terrorist groups. States in conflict situations should be supported with the necessary capacity to suppress the use of such ordnance by terrorist and armed groups. We encourage continued collaborative partnerships between the United Nations Triangular Partnership Programme and the International Peace Support Training Centre in Nairobi in order to supply the urgent training and assistance needed to deal with this threat. United Nations and regional peacekeeping missions should also be strengthened with the relevant capabilities to enhance proactive force deployment that can pre-empt and defuse improvised explosive devices.

Fourthly, children born to active terrorists or who have been recruited by terrorists and militant groups need assistance when they surrender or are captured. Too many children with family links to terrorist groups are languishing in refugee camps, especially in Syria. The United Nations and the international community

should take the lead in their rehabilitation, counselling, disengagement and reintegration into communities outside the camps. Reintegration must ensure that the specific needs of children are addressed, including through access to health care, psychosocial support and education programmes. In Kenya's experience, the effective reintegration of children radicalized by terrorists includes proper identification, risk assessment, vetting, disengagement and reintegration, probation, aftercare and further surveillance. Kenya is ready to work with Member States and the Secretary-General to deploy to countries affected by armed conflict an initiative for training and capacity-building for disengagement and reintegration and other aspects of our programme.

We also call for the continued support of UNICEF, the Peacebuilding Commission and other relevant United Nations entities in assisting Member States to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated in their initiatives.

I reaffirm Kenya's commitment to continue working closely with members of Security Council on this important agenda.

Mrs. Ngyema Ndong (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for taking the initiative of convening this important high-level debate, which once again provides us with an opportunity to reaffirm the need to protect this vulnerable segment of the population — children — who systematically pay a high price in situations of instability and conflict. We welcome the participation of Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Ms. Catherine Russell and civil society representative Patrick Kumi at this debate. We thank them for their insightful contributions and their personal commitment to the cause of children, particularly children in armed conflict.

The effects of security crises on children's well-being led the Security Council in 2005 to acknowledge that violations of children's rights are a matter of international peace and security. The adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) prioritized this item on the Council's agenda. Resolutions 2143 (2014) and 1998 (2011) attest to the Council's commitment in that regard. Since then, much progress has been made and thousands of child soldiers have been released and reintegrated into society. Similarly, many countries in conflict have adopted national action plans to stop

the recruitment of child soldiers and accelerate their release and reintegration.

In addition to those achievements, more than ever, we need to shoulder our even greater responsibility to step up our advocacy on behalf of all children caught in the stranglehold of precariousness, poverty and instability, which is sometimes chronic in certain regions plagued by armed conflict.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) on the issue reminds us that the situation remains worrisome. In Yemen, Myanmar and Afghanistan, millions of children continue to be indoctrinated and recruited as soldiers and no longer have access to schools. In the Sahel and other parts of the world, the combined effects of insecurity and the impact of climate change pose a constant threat to children. We must therefore seize the opportunity provided by this debate to better reflect together on how to build sustainable peace through the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda.

Our message for this debate is unequivocal: children belong with their parents, in their communities and in school — not on the battlefield. The international community bears the responsibility to reconnect children affected by conflict with their educational systems, including through technology and innovative means. The use of temporary mobile classrooms can provide a solution that can be duplicated in such conditions and become part of the United Nations humanitarian response.

In order to better ensure the protection of children's rights, we must also address the root causes of instability. Hunger, poverty and limited basic infrastructure — or the complete lack of access to it — sometimes drive children, even in times of peace, to join armed and terrorist groups. In that regard, facilitating development, poverty reduction and gender equality must be preserved in all circumstances. The most vulnerable States must be supported, and their capacities must be strengthened.

Furthermore, the protection of children in armed conflict can be strengthened in several aspects.

First, with regard to prevention, early-warning mechanisms in conflict environments can serve as a radar to detect situations in which children are at risk, strengthen the monitoring of existing criminal networks, prevent opportunistic networks from forming

and intensify awareness-raising processes. Cooperation among States and the concerted actions of the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, we believe, are critical for promoting information-sharing, particularly with regard to cross-border movement.

Secondly, with regard to combating impunity, those responsible for child recruitment and violence, crimes and abuse against children must be held accountable for their actions.

Thirdly, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes adapted to the specific needs of child soldiers, including rehabilitation and quick-impact projects for children, must be implemented. We believe that the ratio of released child soldiers to those who have been permanently reintegrated into society remains rather low.

In that regard, we must propose sustainable and long-term reintegration programmes that include quality educational content, health care and psychosocial support, while of course integrating the specific and differentiated needs of girls and children with disabilities. All of that will be possible only if such specific programmes receive long-term financial and technical support.

In conclusion, it is critical that our overall conflict-resolution strategies in general and our efforts on behalf of children affected by conflict in particular be based on protection, prevention, the creation of multifaceted partnerships and resilience-building. At the same time, they should also address the root causes of armed conflict. Such an approach will guarantee that today's child soldiers will become tomorrow's leaders.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank Brazil for convening this debate and very warmly welcome, you, Ambassador Fernando Simas Magalhães, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the Security Council. My delegation is also grateful for the briefings by Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Executive Director Catherine Russell and Mr. Patrick Kumi, whose courageous and moving testimony we greatly appreciated.

As we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the mandate on children and armed conflict, it is clear that the agenda remains a priority. But it continues faces new challenges, as children are never excluded from the impact of wars

and, as a consequence, are the most affected. As we heard, the relevant United Nations reports give a clear account on their behalf.

For Mexico, the protection of children in armed conflict remains a high priority from the perspective of preventive diplomacy and the protection of civilians in conflict, as well as for building sustainable peace in post-conflict situations. It must also be underscored that armed conflict is one of the main causes of the forced displacement of millions upon millions of children.

Mexico was the first elected member of the Security Council to chair the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, in 2009 and 2010. We have once again assumed that responsibility as Vice-Chair, working closely together with the presidency of Norway.

It is undeniably true that there has been progress over the past 20-plus years. Nevertheless, the listing of parties to conflict continues. However, it is true that the number of those who have been delisted is greater. It is also noteworthy that there have been no re-listings of parties to conflict, which is significant, as it suggests that the mandate is ever-improving and effective and must be strengthened.

We highly welcome the tangible results achieved with the development and implementation of the 17 current action plans and the other commitments made more recently. A compelling fact is that, since the Office of the Special Representative was established, more than 170,000 children have been released. That is no small figure.

Looking ahead, it is clear that the Security Council must continue to build on the achievements of the Working Group. Coordination between the Working Group and other subsidiary bodies of the Council, including some sanctions committees, needs to be strengthened.

While the prevention of grave violations is clearly the main task of the Working Group's mandate, it is also important to ensure the full implementation of reintegration programmes. Assistance programmes should always be designed with an age and a gender perspective and should include mental health aspects.

It is becoming increasingly clear that psychosocial support is an essential pillar of that mandate, as it should be for all humanitarian assistance programmes. It is clear that full reintegration also requires national child protection services that include education for all

and social security. It is therefore not enough to prohibit the recruitment of minors and child marriage. We must go further.

We trust that such proposals will be grounds for unity and action among all the members of the Security Council and the entire membership of the United Nations.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I join other speakers in thanking our briefers today for their illuminating remarks. I would like to highlight three key points in relation to what we heard today.

First, the United Kingdom welcomes the inclusion of the situations in Ukraine, Ethiopia and Mozambique in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2022/493). Data gathered by United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations on the ground attest to the serious protection needs of children in those countries.

Establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms will build an even stronger evidence base so that all parties can identify the actions needed to prevent grave violations against children.

In Ukraine, there is already ample evidence that Russia is committing at least four of the six grave violations against children. Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter will have our full support in engaging on that agenda. But there is only one solution to ending the suffering of Ukrainian children, that is, an end to Russia's illegal invasion.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned that attacks on schools have continued to increase, including targeted attacks on girls' schools. The United Kingdom has long campaigned for the right of every girl to 12 years of quality education; that includes girls affected by conflict.

We continue to urge all Member States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and to address the gendered impact of attacks on education. I again echo the Secretary-General's call for the Taliban to enable the immediate return of all Afghan girls to the classroom.

Thirdly, the increase in cases of sexual violence against children documented in the Secretary-General's report is particularly concerning given that those figures no doubt represent only the tip of the iceberg.

Tackling sexual violence in conflict and ensuring support for survivors remain a top priority for the

United Kingdom, including with respect to children. We will convene an international conference in London in November to that end.

Ahead of that conference, we are committed to strengthening the international legal architecture to improve accountability for sexual violence in conflict and to rolling out the Murad Code, launched here in April. We welcome all Member States joining us in that effort.

Mr. Flynn (Ireland): I thank Brazil for hosting this important annual meeting. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and Executive Director Russell for their tireless advocacy for children globally. I thank Mr. Kumi for his truly powerful testimony, as well as for his very clear recommendations.

Once again, as we meet to discuss this important topic, we confront shocking numbers of violations against children. But behind every figure, as we heard this morning, there is a child who has had their life derailed or destroyed and their future undermined.

Children worldwide, including girls, children with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer plus children and, as this debate has highlighted, refugee, stateless and internally displaced children, experience conflict in different ways. The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict worldwide robs children of their childhoods and puts them at risk on the front lines. The denial of humanitarian access blocks life-saving aid and services from reaching children.

We are dismayed by the high numbers of children killed and maimed globally last year, notably in Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan, as well as during the escalation of violence in May 2021 in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. We urge the relevant parties to cooperate with the Secretary-General and put in place action plans.

The extent to which children are impacted by violations of international humanitarian law, including those arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, is appalling. We call on all States to support the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, which was recently concluded following a process led by Ireland in Geneva. Stark increases in abductions, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence have horrific impacts on

children and differentiated consequences for girls and boys.

We urge all parties to release abducted children and end further violations of their rights. Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence must receive comprehensive health and psychosocial support. Attacks on schools and hospitals destroy another lifeline for children, and we must work to implement resolution 2601 (2021). Education is vital for children affected by conflict and is an indispensable right for all children. In that regard, we reiterate our call for the Taliban to allow girls in Afghanistan to return to school.

Amid horrendous violations against children, we commend the decision of the Secretary-General to add Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine to the list of situations of concern with immediate effect, as well as his call for more monitoring in the central Sahel region. Such situations have shown just how quickly escalations of violence can destroy children's livelihoods and illustrate why rapid action is necessary. Since the onset of Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, grave violations have destroyed the lives of many children. We call on Russia to end those senseless attacks and stop all violations against children.

As this is Ireland's last open debate on children and armed conflict as an elected Council member for this term, I want to finish with a number of reflections.

First, as we know, there is much law to protect children, but there is a lack of implementation. We call on parties to conflict to comply with international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. We call for accountability for violations.

Secondly, our fine words in this context must be accompanied by hard cash. Funding is required to keep pace with a growing number of violations and situations of concern to monitor crimes, protect children and ensure reintegration support. This includes support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF and United Nations missions, including those in transition.

Thirdly, holistic reintegration and peacebuilding are vital for healing and recovery. We must build on the successes achieved by United Nations action plans globally. We should mainstream the children and armed conflict agenda across the Peacebuilding Commission

and Peacebuilding Fund. Investing in the agenda is investing in children's futures.

Fourthly, all children are equal, and grave violations of the laws that protect them are equally unacceptable, no matter where they happen. Ireland continues to call for the objective, impartial and transparent listing of perpetrators in the annex of the annual report, including based on patterns and trends, in order to promote accountability. In order to be effective, listing must be objective and accurately reflect the facts on the ground. Progress by parties to conflict must be recognized only if it is real and demonstrable. Parties must cooperate with the United Nations to develop action plans to end violations against children, or face consequences.

Fifthly, we must advocate children's rights at every opportunity. We call on States to endorse the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, and to become parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Ireland has been immensely proud to serve in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Our children are our future. To protect and invest in them is to invest in our future peace and prosperity.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to express our gratitude to you, Mr. Simas Magalhães, and to the entire Brazilian delegation for organizing today's open debate. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell and Mr. Patrick Kumi for their comprehensive briefings. The Russian Federation truly values the work that they do for children.

The war started by the Kyiv authorities in 2014 against the people of the Donbas has hit children in the cruellest ways. Over the eight years of armed conflict in this region, hundreds of children have died. Ten times more have been injured. The youngest victim of the Ukrainian aggression was only 27 days old when killed. Children are dying as a result of artillery shelling and from sniper fire. They are being blown up by mines laid by Ukrainian army as far back as 2014 and 2015 on forest footpaths and near bodies of water. These children are being seriously traumatized. For eight years, children in the Donbas have been born, gone to school, lived and grown up under constant shelling from Kyiv.

Armed units of Ukraine are cynically shelling civilian infrastructure in the Donbas nursery schools, schools and medical institutions. Children are also being killed using weapons provided by the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Czechia, Slovakia, the Netherlands and other countries, which are therefore complicit in crimes of the Ukrainian regime against children.

I will share some statistics just from the week of 8 to 14 July. On 8 July, Ukrainian armed forces shelled nursery school No. 118 and a music school in Horlivka, medical facility No. 3, an Olympic reserve school and a children's educational health centre in Donetsk, and school No. 19 in Shakhtarsk. On 9 July, Ukrainian forces shelled nursery schools Nos. 380 and 398, school No. 113 in Donetsk and a nursery school in Horlivka. On 10 July, school No. 4 was shelled, as were school No. 51 and a centre of primary medical care No. 3 in Donetsk, together with school No. 19 in Horlivka. On 12 July, nursery school No. 86 in Horlivka was shelled, as were a children's centre in Makiivka and a primary medical service centre in Donetsk. On 13 July, the Republican Clinical Psychological and Neurological hospital, was shelled in Donetsk. On 14 July, school No. 46 was hit in Makiivka.

These statistics represent a single week. Over the last months, in the Donetsk People's Republic alone, 249 civilians died, including 16 children. Some 1,493 people were injured, including 83 children. As a result of shelling, 72 medical institutions and 238 educational institutions have been damaged.

But that is not all: the Kyiv authorities do not balk at directly targeting children either. For example, a schoolgirl from Luhansk, Faina Savenkova, whose personal data were published on the infamous Peacemaker site in October 2021. On the eve of the Day of the Protection of Children, Faina wrote an open letter to the United Nations requesting that it not to forget the children of the Donbas. She and her family immediately started to receive threats. We turned to the Secretary-General and asked for assistance to remove this child's personal data from a Ukrainian neo-Nazi website so as to protect her, but unfortunately we have not seen any results.

At the same time, the situation is only worsening. I can inform the Security Council today that Russian non-governmental organizations have found that the personal data of at least 327 minors has been published

on the Peacemaker website, which poses a real threat to their lives. Today we will pass information about this on to the Secretary-General. I would also like to draw Ms. Russell's particular attention to this unacceptable situation.

One of the aims of Russia's special operation is to protect the people and children of the Donbas from the crimes committed by the Ukrainian regime. According to data from the Interagency Coordination Office, as of the 12 July, since the start of the special military operation, 2,497,432 people have been evacuated from the dangerous regions of Ukraine, namely, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, to the Russian Federation, including 392,890 children. All of these people came to our country voluntarily, saving their own lives and the lives of their children. We categorically reject unfounded accusations that the Russian authorities are abducting children.

In constituent entities of the Russian Federation, we have more than 9,500 temporary accommodation points working permanently. We also have field offices, with regional children's ombudspersons, to work with evacuees. All refugees receive individual support, and we provide assistance to address various pressing issues in terms of further accommodation, ensuring that food and basic necessities are met and that social benefits being paid. Particular attention is paid by the Russian Federation's Presidential Commissioner for Children Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, with regard to families with minors, orphans and unaccompanied children.

Children younger than school age attend nursery schools, and school-age children go to general or vocational educational institutions. Many of them are provided with targeted humanitarian and medical assistance, including psychological rehabilitation. The main aim is to help these children forget all the horrors they have lived through over the last eight years, when Kyiv, with the complicity of its Western sponsors, started to destroy peaceful civilian life in the Donbas, and this with impunity. A separate area of the work carried out by the Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatiana Moskalkova is locating relatives of minors whose parents have died as a result of bombing and shelling from the Ukrainian forces.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the rights to life and development for children, access to housing, health care, education and protection from all forms of violence. Children have a right to specific

care and assistance. Russia is helping children in the Donbas to benefit from these rights.

We took note of the Secretary-General's decision to take up the situation in Ukraine as a situation of concern in the next report and request a special representative to address the issue. For our part, we stand ready to cooperate with a special representative of the Secretary-General on the situation in Ukraine, including providing the information that we have.

The topic of child protection in the Syrian Arab Republic is still relevant, particularly in the areas not controlled by the Government. Against the backdrop of a gradual stabilization of the security situation in a large part of the Syrian territory, a main obstacle to ensuring the protection of children's rights is the complex humanitarian situation combined with the worsening socioeconomic situation following the imposition of suffocating sanctions by the United States and the European Union. Washington should immediately end its unlawful occupation of part of Syrian territory and its pillaging of the country's natural and agricultural resources. American troops should be withdrawn from the territory of that State, to which they were never invited.

In regions held by illegal armed groups and terrorist organizations, children's rights are being systematically violated. Children are being recruited into military units and involved in terrorist activities. They are being deprived of access to education and subject to propaganda and radical ideology. The real breeding grounds for that phenomenon are the camps for internally displaced persons in the north-east of Syria, Al-Hol and Roj, where families of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant fighters are located.

The majority of Western States persist in refusing to repatriate their citizens and members of their families despite the many calls made by the Secretary-General and interested States to that end. Unlike them, we are actively working to repatriate Russian children from armed-conflict zones, as decreed by the Russian Head of State. That work in Syria has been done by a specialized inter-agency working commission led by the Russian presidential commissioner on children's rights.

So far, 252 children have returned from prisons and shelters in Damascus and from temporary accommodations in the north-east of Syria. There is an effective system in place to fulfil the necessary legal, organizational and administrative procedures. In

Russia, children have the necessary qualified support provided to them. Measures are taken to ensure their medical recovery and social adaptation.

I should like also to touch also on the situation in Afghanistan. Years of unlawful occupation by the United States and its NATO allies of the territory of that State has brought incalculable misery to the people of Afghanistan. In many previous years, Afghanistan had one of the highest numbers of recorded crimes against children, committed, inter alia, by the armed forces of the former Government and their sponsors located oceans away. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) also contains heartbreaking statistics on the violations against children committed in the first half of 2021, up until the rushed withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan.

Following its liberation from foreign occupation, the situation in Afghanistan radically changed. We also need to ensure that the United States returns the assets stolen from Afghanistan, which are currently being held in American banks. The Afghan people urgently need those assets to be able to ensure economic recovery, tackle poverty and create infrastructure, including schools and hospitals.

The American authorities' cynicism truly knows no bounds, holding forth on Afghan children's rights while keeping monies destined for the people of Afghanistan. No less cynical are the cruel actions committed in Afghanistan by the United Kingdom. Suffice it to remember the BBC's discovery of the fact that British special forces had killed hundreds of innocent citizens, including children, in night-time raids during the United Kingdom forces' presence in Afghanistan. Information on those crimes was made public in 2018 and 2019, but the scandal was quashed thanks to the vehement statements made by the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom about investigations and the punishment of the perpetrators if the accusations proved true. We understand that that has not been done.

We call on the Special Representative to keep a focus on Afghanistan and carry out the necessary monitoring.

In conclusion, I should like to underscore that we agree with the proposal contained in Brazil's concept note (S/2022/540, annex) about devoting particular attention to refugee children. We share the concern of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) regarding the growing number

of children forced to leave their homes. According to UNHCR data, 41 per cent, or 36.5 million, of the overall number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the world are children.

Of particular concern is the situation in the Mediterranean sea, where people, including children, are still dying as they try to reach Europe. Thus, according to the IOM, since the start of 2022 the number of people dying or going missing while crossing the Mediterranean has reached 970 migrants, including 32 children. In 2021, 2,048 people died, including 76 children. We are convinced that the most effective way of addressing the problem of those forced to migrate, including children, is to address the root causes that force such people to leave their homes. We believe that addressing that issue entails political solutions in migrants' countries of origin and the provision of assistance for social and economic development and State-building in the fight against terrorism.

We will continue to make a significant contribution to strengthening the international regime for protecting refugees and addressing migration-related problems, providing far-reaching humanitarian support and also actively participating in political efforts to prevent and resolve crises.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me thank the Brazilian presidency for having organized this open debate as well as the briefers for their insightful presentations.

Twenty-six years after the creation of a mandate dedicated to strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict, there have been some deliverables. More than 170,000 children have been released from armed groups and armed forces; 39 action plans have been signed between the United Nations and parties to conflict; and the Security Council has placed the issue of children and armed conflict on its agenda as a central issue with an impact on peace and security.

Yet despite the progress made in strengthening the normative and institutional framework on children and armed conflict, implementation lags far behind; it remains weak and unsatisfactory. As the findings of the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) indicate, the situation of children in many parts of the world is dire.

The proliferation of armed conflicts and armed groups employing extreme violence against children, particularly their killing, maiming and recruiting, is

alarming. We are seeing an increase in the number of cases of abduction, cases of sexual violence against children, especially against girls, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, and their use for military purposes. An ever-growing number of children is being forced to flee in search of protection.

Coups and violent takeovers of power have aggravated the situation of children in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Sudan. In Myanmar, the military junta has brutally attacked and killed children and systematically violated their human rights, while in Afghanistan girls continue to be denied the basic fundamental right to attend secondary school. That should and must be reversed.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, the situation remains grim for many children, who are the subject of grave violations and in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

The Secretary-General has added new situations of concern in his report. That is something we called for and which we welcome. That is a very important first step towards advancing country-level progress to protect children everywhere through the children and armed conflict agenda's mandating tools.

Reports from Ukraine remain deeply concerning. As a result of Russia's war, some 349 children have been killed and hundreds more injured, and 4.3 million children have been forced out of their homes. Those still inside the country remain trapped in the horrors of a war that after five months continues to be as deadly as it was the first day.

Children in Ukraine do not go to sleep with bedtime stories. They are terrified by the detonation of shells and the explosion of missiles. They are denied dreams and are left only with nightmares. That should stop.

There is an undeniable sense of urgency for change, to do more and to do better, and to do that we believe that, first, we must focus more on prevention and accountability. We must, of course, invest more in prevention, but that cannot be fully achieved without proper accountability. Holding the perpetrators of such violations accountable increases the cost of non-compliance with international law and may deter future violations.

Secondly, we need to strengthen the children and armed conflict mandate and make it more agile so as

to tackle the actions and violations committed by all actors, in particular non-State armed groups. There is a need for dedicated child-protection capacity in United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions, including in the context of transitions.

Thirdly, child-protection practitioners, civil-society organizations and humanitarian personnel in the field must be protected. All parties must allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access as well as access by children to services, assistance and protection.

Fourthly, we need to better address the challenges linked to the integration and rehabilitation of children, who today represent more than half of refugees worldwide.

In the course of the last three years, Albania has taken decisive steps to address the horrific situation of the children and women of Albanian origin trapped in several refugee camps in Syria and Iraq. Albania has conducted three repatriations of children and women from Syria and Iraq, which in total included 28 children and nine women. The latest repatriation took place in May, in which 10 children and three women were successfully brought back to the country. We thank UNICEF for its continued support during and after the repatriation process and for providing a full package of child-care services. The same has been done for Afghan children received by Albania, with additional support for education and health and for making them feel at home, as far as possible.

We all have an obligation to prevent and respond to violence against children and to their abuse, neglect and exploitation. For that we need laws and policies, dedicated human and financial resources, responsible governance, data collection and monitoring, child-protection and response services and constant support to families and communities. It is our moral duty and our legal responsibility to do whatever is needed to make sure that children are raised with care, love and protection, away from violence and conflict.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Sir, for presiding over today's meeting, and I thank Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and Executive Director Russell for their briefings. I also listened carefully to Mr. Kumi's statement. Based on his own experience, Mr. Kumi gave us a thought-provoking account of the endless pain and wounds that armed conflict inflicts on children. Children deserve

a carefree childhood and should not be forced into the wars created by adults or grow up in fear of violence, yet the Secretary-General's annual report for 2021 on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) once again shows us the harrowing realities.

In the past year, 19,000 children in 21 conflict-stricken countries and regions were subjected to nearly 24,000 serious violations, an average of 65 per day. Among those violations, the killing and maiming, recruitment and use of children and the denial of humanitarian access to them stand out as most shocking. The fact that those young lives were subjected to repeated merciless pain confronts us with inescapable questions about the international community's moral conscience and ability to protect the next generation. Those children have lost their homes and childhoods to war, and we cannot let them lose their future and hopes on top of that. The best way to protect children is to put an end to conflict. The Security Council should strive for a cessation of hostilities and an end to fighting while working for political solutions so that children caught in the depths of conflict can see peace dawn as soon as possible. In addition, the Council should take a zero-tolerance approach to violence, ensure the protection of all children and firmly prevent violent conflict from trampling on children's fundamental rights. With that in mind, I would like to share a few points.

First, we must put an end to egregious violations against children. The six grave violations against children, as defined in Security Council resolutions, should never be permitted in conflict situations. The parties to conflicts should end their grave violations against children, increase their cooperation with the United Nations, formulate action plans for the protection of children and prioritize children's rights and interests during the mediation of disputes and peace talks and in processes for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and post-conflict peacebuilding. The international community should leave no gaps in child protection. Countries that have not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child should take immediate action. Truth and justice in this area must be upheld, and the perpetrators of grave violations against children should be held accountable. It has recently been pointed out in the media that between 2010 and 2011, foreign special forces in Afghanistan killed civilians indiscriminately and went so far as to hold killing contests, many of whose victims were

children. Such atrocities are deeply shocking, and the perpetrators should be severely punished.

Secondly, we should afford all children protection without discrimination, whether they are boys, girls, children with disabilities, refugee or immigrant children or children held by terrorists and armed groups. All children should enjoy the basic rights stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and should not be treated unfairly for any reason. It is appalling that tens of thousands of refugee children in the refugee detention centres at the borders of certain countries are made to endure rampant disease and a lack of proper sanitation and food while being forcibly separated from their parents. Other refugee children have been deported and forced to survive amid violence, poverty and displacement. Children associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham are all victims, and we endorse the Secretary-General's appeal that they be granted the right to voluntary repatriation.

Thirdly, we should provide children with opportunities for comprehensive development. Poverty, hunger and being forced to drop out of school leave children more vulnerable to violence. Adequate nutrition, education and skills give them the opportunity to emerge from the shadows of war. The international community should encourage countries in conflict situations to increase policy support and resource investment for children in order to expand dedicated assistance for them in the fields of development and education. Amid our global food, energy and financial crises, children in conflict now need help more than ever. Cuts in development aid are tantamount to weakening the protection of children. In Afghanistan, poverty is spreading and hunger is raging, with children being the most vulnerable victims. The decision by some countries to freeze or misappropriate Afghanistan's overseas assets as the country is going through such difficult times is depriving Afghan children of their hopes of survival. The reckless imposition of unilateral coercive measures is making those children and other vulnerable groups pay the highest price, and such practices should be changed.

Fourthly, we should make good use of the child-protection toolbox. The Secretary-General's annual report and its listing and delisting mechanisms are indicative of the state of child protection in conflict-stricken areas and countries. Clear, uniform and measurable listing criteria should be established. The Security Council Working Group on Children and

Armed Conflict should adopt the same frequency of deliberations and the same cycle for issuing country-specific conclusions, and should avoid paying attention selectively, based on political positions.

The question of Palestine has remained elusive for more than seven decades. Countless children have died in childhood, and generations of them have never seen a way out towards peace. With gang violence intensifying in Haiti, more than 1,700 schools have closed since April, and more than half a million children have lost access to education. The killing, kidnapping and recruitment of children by gangsters have cast shadows over their childhoods. If we choose to continue to disregard the legitimate rights of Palestinian and Haitian children, how many more tragedies will we have to witness before long-overdue justice can be restored to them?

Though much remains to be done, the past year has nonetheless brought us promising news. Through the efforts of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter, 12,214 children embroiled in conflict have been released, and the competent United Nations agencies are actively working to save children. With China's help, 10-year-old Muhammad, from Syria's Al-Hasakah governorate, was fitted with a prosthetic limb on his right leg, which had been severed by a bomb. Since then, he has been able to bid farewell to his wheelchair. With China's help, Amran, a displaced mother in Bosaso, Somalia, enjoys nutritious meals with her two preschool-age daughters and is no longer threatened by severe famine and malnutrition.

So long as there is action, there is hope. From the Middle East to North Africa, from Europe to Latin America and from the Horn of Africa to the Sahara, the eyes of young children are upon us, and we cannot let them down.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Arbeiter (Canada): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We welcome today's open debate, convened by Brazil, and thank the briefers for their statements. We would in particular like to acknowledge and thank Patrick Kumi for sharing his experiences and recommendations. We encourage the Security Council

to regularly include children and youth briefers in its deliberations and briefings. We call for the safe and meaningful inclusion and participation of children and young people in all peace and security matters, including political and peace processes, protection and humanitarian responses and reintegration programming.

The Group of Friends is deeply concerned about the figures and trends presented in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2022/493). Reading the report together with the recent analysis conducted by UNICEF, which highlights the fact that grave violations have increased year after year for the past 16 years, we are presented with a dire picture of the plight of conflict-affected children.

The persistently high levels of killing or maiming of children, the recruitment and use of children and the denial of humanitarian assistance by parties to armed conflict are extremely troubling. The dramatic increase in abductions is cause for serious concern, as abduction often leads to other grave violations against children. The significant increases in verified incidents of sexual violence against children are also alarming and must be reversed. That grave violation disproportionately affects girls and also impacts boys and is already prone to severe under-reporting and lack of data.

We are dismayed by the widespread attacks against schools and hospitals as described in the report, particularly amid the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic, which is causing the largest disruption to children's education in history. Furthermore, we are alarmed by the soaring numbers of children displaced as a result of conflict and violence around the world — now more than 36.5 million children, according to the United Nations. That figure does not include the more than 4.5 million children who have been displaced by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Displaced children face heightened risks, including vulnerability to trafficking, forced deportation, exploitation, recruitment and use and other abuses; children with disabilities and those who are unaccompanied or separated from their caregivers are at especially high risk. Against that troubling backdrop, the Group of Friends would like to make the following recommendations, on which we are committed to following up through our own collective engagement.

First, we urge all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and

international refugee law and to act to prevent and end grave violations against children. To that end, we strongly encourage all parties to armed conflict to sign and implement action plans and other concrete and time-bound measures to enhance the protection of children in armed conflict.

Secondly, we call for full accountability for grave violations through national and international justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court. True justice also involves reparations and access to gender- and age-sensitive comprehensive specialized services, including medical, mental health and psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health-care services and legal and livelihood support for survivors of grave violations.

Thirdly, a growing number of Member States have acceded to or endorsed key instruments aimed at strengthening the protection of children in armed conflict. We encourage all States Members of the United Nations to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to consider endorsing and implementing practical child-protection instruments, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and Commitments and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Fourthly, we call for adequate resourcing for child protection specialists and activities, including within United Nations peace operations, United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting and international fact-finding and investigative mechanisms, as well as international judicial bodies.

Fifthly and finally, we urge the Security Council, Member States, the Secretariat and host countries to support the full implementation of child protection mandates by United Nations peace operations, including in contexts in which the United Nations may be transitioning. We also recall the importance of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund, which can play key roles in mobilizing attention and resources to address the needs of children in conflict and post-conflict settings, including for the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups.

(spoke in French)

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate on children and armed conflict, we express our sincere gratitude for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and all those involved in the protection of children within the United Nations and civil society.

Over the past 25 years, we have worked together to implement a range of robust tools to support that unique and important mandate, ranging from the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, among many others. Those tools must be upheld and strengthened.

In that regard, the Group of Friends reaffirms the importance of the independence, impartiality and credibility of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, as well as the mechanism for establishing the lists contained in the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Those two tools together remain particularly important in our efforts to protect children and foster accountability for serious violations.

We note that Ethiopia, Mozambique, Ukraine and the central Sahel region have been included in the report, with immediate effect, as situations of concern. We also underline the decisions taken concerning the lists contained in the annexes to the report and the criteria underpinning those decisions.

We reaffirm our long-standing call for the information presented in the Secretary-General's annual reports, as collected and verified by the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, to be accurate and to be reflected in the annexes to the report in a timely manner. We also recall that it is important for the Secretary-General to use clear criteria and procedures for the listing and delisting of the parties to conflict that are deemed to be responsible for serious violations in all situations mentioned in the report.

Allow me to make a brief statement as the representative of Canada.

More than 40 million children throughout the world are now displaced due to conflict and violence. That statistic exceeds the total population of my country, Canada, and the populations of more than 157 States Members of the United Nations. The displacement of a child due to war is one displacement too many; the

displacement of more than 40 million children is a disaster — one that is human-made.

Although this issue is the subject of debate within the Council, those violations occur in States in which Governments and other stakeholders have obligations. In Afghanistan, the Taliban shamelessly tramples the rights of girls, in particular their right to education. Last year, more Afghan boys were killed or maimed than in any other country of the world. In the central Sahel and Lake Chad basin regions, we note a considerable increase in the number of serious violations perpetrated against girls. In Syria, the Al-Assad regime continues its attacks on children, bombs schools and hospitals and recruits children into its armed forces.

We are concerned about the decision to list the Syrian Government in annex I.B to the Secretary-General's report. That decision should have been taken only based on a significant decrease in serious violations and respect for specific time-bound commitments. According to the report of the Secretary-General, the Syrian Government has not achieved either of those things. The decision therefore sets a troubling precedent.

In Ukraine, children have been killed or maimed by Russian forces. It can be proved that deliberate large-scale attacks have been mounted against schools and hospitals. Russia has arrested and forcibly expelled hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children. Rape and sexual violence against Ukrainian girls and boys are widespread. Those are not mere assertions by Canada but facts that have been corroborated by the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and independent organizations.

(spoke in English)

The designation of Ukraine as a situation of concern in the Secretary-General's report is a welcome step, as is the inclusion of Ethiopia and Mozambique in the same category. We applaud the Secretary-General's initiative. In those three situations and all others, we urge the Secretary-General to ensure that the verification of information on grave violations against children leads to accurate, credible and transparent listing decisions. That is critical to changing behaviour and holding the parties to conflict accountable. Allow me to make three points to conclude.

First, we hear the calls for more resources for child protection. There is no substitute for dedicated expertise. And we know that the demands on the

system are greater than ever. Canada is committed to advocating for those resources to ensure that the United Nations has what it needs to do this important work.

Secondly, it is encouraging to see the growing number of countries endorsing key instruments aimed at protecting children.

Thirdly and finally, for years Canada and many other Member States have asked the Secretary-General to release his report earlier in advance of the Council's annual open debate on the subject. It is an important report, with significant decisions that can affect both bilateral and multilateral policies. All Member States, regardless of their status, should have more time to consider and review its contents.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): At the outset, let me express my gratitude to the briefers, in particular Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. We also acknowledge the presence of Mr. Szijjártó, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, which attests to how important this subject is to his Government.

We align ourselves with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and the statement just made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and I would like to add the following points in my national capacity.

The daunting reality faced by children in the 21 countries and one regional situation in 2021, highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493), is alarming. We commend the work of the team for the children and armed conflict agenda in engaging with parties to protect children in a number of countries, including Nigeria, the Philippines, South Sudan, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen, which has resulted in the release of more than 12,000 children from armed groups and forces. At the same time, the other statistics on grave violations against children in armed conflicts remain distressing. I should also note that the current report does not cover the horrible consequences for children of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which means that their actual extent is even worse.

However, we welcome the Secretary-General's decision in response to Russia's war on my country to

add Ukraine as a situation of concern with immediate effect. All gross violations against children will be subject to daily monitoring by the entire United Nations system throughout the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. As a party to the core international instruments related to the protection of the rights of children, Ukraine remains determined to engage in constructive dialogue and cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in order to stop and prevent violations against children affected by Russia's war of aggression on my country.

Since February, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has already affected 7 million children there. Almost two of every three children have been displaced. According to UNICEF, 3 million children within Ukraine and more than 2.2 million children in host countries are now in need of humanitarian assistance. At least 353 children have been killed, and 666 have been injured, many of them severely. The unabated bombardment and shelling by the Russian armed forces has damaged 2,116 educational institutions, of which 216 have been destroyed. In addition, more than 50 children's health-care facilities and more than 130 homes for orphans and children deprived of parental care have been damaged or destroyed.

Two days ago, residents of the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia gathered to say a final goodbye to four-year-old Liza Dmitrieva. Many people present here today may have seen the two different sets of video footage of this sunny girl, taken on Thursday within an hour of each other. The first shows a child full of life walking joyfully together with her mother. The second was taken immediately following the Russian missile strike on Vinnytsia's city centre, which killed two dozen people, including Liza and two boys, seven and eight years old. The heartbreaking images of Liza lying next to her stroller were shared by the media worldwide and left millions shocked by Russia's brutality and inhumanity. Those images will be used at a future tribunal to try Russian war criminals, and her killers will be sitting in the dock.

The Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine has documented 31 cases of the use of schools and kindergartens for military purposes by the Russian invaders. As of today, 317 children have been reported missing during hostilities. The Office of the Prosecutor General is currently conducting 28

criminal investigations into the abduction and forced deportation of more than 5,000 Ukrainian children to Russia, Belarus and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The real number is much higher, and the Ukrainian Government is continuing to track and collect data to identify all missing, abducted and deported children. We repeat our call to the United Nations and the international community to closely monitor the situation and assist Ukraine in ensuring the rapid and safe return of all children who have been forcibly deported. Ensuring accountability for all grave violations against children, as well as other war crimes and crimes against humanity, is paramount. Together with its partners, Ukraine is sparing no effort to bring all the perpetrators and their commanders to justice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malta.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Brazil for organizing today's open debate. I also thank and commend the Secretary-General, Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF and the other briefers, not least Patrick Kumi, for their contributions.

Malta aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and the statement just made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We remain concerned about the scale and severity of the violations committed against children. We welcome the progress made in engaging with parties to conflict, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493). We have also taken note of the newly listed countries of concern. We encourage the Secretary-General to alert the Security Council whenever there is credible information that parties are committing grave violations, and to include it in his annual report as well.

Malta remains strongly committed to supporting the integrity and impartiality of the listing mechanism of the children and armed conflict agenda, while the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must continue to hold the parties to conflict accountable, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Norway for its leadership of the Group. We deeply regret that the six grave violations remained prevalent in 2021. We remain especially concerned about the increases in the killing and maiming of children, the recruitment of children and the denial of humanitarian access. The rise in abductions, reports of rape and other

forms of conflict-related sexual violence make it more imperative than ever to accelerate efforts to strengthen the monitoring and reporting of such violence against girls and boys. We condemn them in the strongest possible terms. Impunity is completely unacceptable.

Gender-inclusive justice involving child victims or survivors is crucial. Children with disabilities are also disproportionately affected by armed conflict. We encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to ensure that they too are considered in the implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate. Internally displaced children must be guaranteed the same rights and freedoms as all other children, but they often face discrimination. The reports of abuse of refugee and migrant children are appalling. The reintegration of children should be prioritized and sustainable. That requires a long-term vision that brings together stakeholders, including Member States, the United Nations, civil society, financial institutions and the private sector. They have a key role in designing and implementing comprehensive and gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

All parties to conflict must comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights. We encourage all Member States to commit to the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Malta and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General are collaborating to hold a virtual summer school on children and armed conflict later this summer, which will lay the groundwork for diverse individuals working in the field to meaningfully contribute to the children and armed conflict agenda.

Children and armed conflict will be one of our top priorities when we join the Security Council in January 2023. We are convinced that this is an area in which we can contribute in a significant manner.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary.

Mr. Szijjártó (Hungary): First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the Government of Brazil for having convened the Security Council around this topic. We highly value the pro-family policies of your Government, Mr. President, and the Christian-based

approach of the Administration of President Bolsonaro. We also wish the best of luck for the upcoming elections.

Unfortunately, from the perspective of its topic, the meeting that Brazil convened is highly timely. I am representing a country, Hungary, that is a neighbouring country to Ukraine, a country that has been at war for 146 days. I am also representing a generation whose members were born around the end of the 1970s, a generation that had the hope that we would never have to experience war from so close. However, unfortunately, that hope has become an illusion since 24 February, when the war in Ukraine broke out.

That war definitely brings suffering to Ukraine, but also to the neighbouring region and the entire European continent. The war has caused extremely high inflation, a war-inflation environment in Europe, complete uncertainty regarding the energy supply in major parts of the European continent and clearly the threat of a global crisis when it comes to the food supply.

Those who lose the most because of that war are definitely children, who clearly lose the enthusiasm of their childhood and the entire future, or at least a big part of their future is at risk. Without a doubt, the war causes enormous physical and mental suffering for children. As a neighbouring country, from the very beginning of the war, we received 840,000 refugees. Because of the conscription regulations in force in Ukraine, those are clearly families that have been torn apart. They are therefore mostly mothers, accompanied by children and sometimes by grandparents. It is really heartbreaking to see that those families are arriving, leaving their fathers back at home, with total uncertainty of ever reuniting in the future.

To help those people fleeing from war, Hungary has been carrying out the country's largest-ever humanitarian aid action in its history. We receive everyone who would like to come to Hungary, and we take good care of them, especially the children. We enrol all the children who will stay in Hungary for the longer term in kindergartens and schools. We provide assistance when it comes to language. Our language is perhaps the most complicated language on Earth. We therefore definitely have to help the children arriving to at least have some connection with our language. In order to create some kind of normal circumstances for those children, 897 kindergartens, elementary schools and secondary schools of ours have been involved in the programme to enrol Ukrainian children. By June, more

than 2,000 Ukrainian children had been enrolled in our kindergartens and schools, and we are ready to also do the same in the upcoming period of the school year.

I would like to underline that exactly the same rights as Hungarian children are being enjoyed by Ukrainian children when it comes to education and access to health-care services. In addition, we have provided special treatment in our hospitals to 130 children from Ukraine and a scholarship, fully financed by the Hungarian State, to 1,000 students from Ukraine who could not continue their studies in the universities due to the fact that they were not operational, and we provide those who pass their school-leaving exam at the beginning of the summer and cannot continue their studies in universities with State-financed scholarships.

However, here we come to the really important question, which is the following. What is the solution to all the problems that the war has created and to ending the suffering of those children? It is definitely one word, that is, peace. As a representative of a neighbouring country to Ukraine, I would like to urge the international community to do all that it can and not to spare any effort to restore peace to our region. Instead of measures that might prolong the war, we must do our best to establish an immediate ceasefire and to finally launch peace talks, because peace talks are the only way to go forward and to end the suffering of the people, especially children, in Ukraine.

I would like to warmly thank the Government of Brazil once again and to wish it the best of luck for the future.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Szijjártó for his kind words.

I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) underlines the unconscionable suffering of children in armed conflict, which has sadly increased over the past year. We wish to highlight in particular the significant rise in sexual violence perpetrated against boys and girls, as also documented by the All Survivors Project non-governmental organization. Educational institutions are increasingly used for military purposes and are subject to targeted attacks in places such as Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan. Young girls in particular face a heightened risk of abduction in, or on the way to,

school, such as in the Lake Chad basin region. In the same vein, pandemic-related school closures increase the potential for the recruitment of child soldiers, as children out of school are easy targets.

The war in Ukraine adds another shocking dimension to the appalling scale of the grave violations committed against children in conflict. Massive numbers of Ukraine's children have been displaced, and hundreds died, as a result of the Russian aggression. Reports of the forced separation of families, as well as the abduction and forced deportation of Ukrainian children in high numbers to Russian territory, are particularly alarming and constitute yet another serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Strengthening accountability is crucial to ending impunity for grave violations against children. Criminal investigations and prosecutions should adopt child-sensitive approaches, as well as dedicated resources, to enable the safe and meaningful participation of victims and survivors in such legal proceedings.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court mandates the Court's Prosecutor to investigate and prosecute the conscription, enlistment and use of child soldiers. Those who recruit children, or use them, to take active part in hostilities are committing serious international crimes and must be held to account. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict is another meaningful instrument, ratified by 172 countries. Despite that broad support, the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict continues unabated. In order to safeguard children and protect them from the physical and mental trauma inflicted by conflict, we need to redouble our efforts to promote the strict adherence to both the Optional Protocol and other instruments, including the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration.

Moreover, in line with its own resolution 2068 (2012), the Security Council should take targeted measures against parties that persistently violate the rights of children in armed conflict. We continue our strong support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Its independence and integrity are crucial to its effectiveness and credibility, which also includes the objective, consistent and transparent

practice of listing parties that have committed grave violations against children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important annual open debate. I also thank the briefers for sharing their perspectives.

During armed conflicts, international humanitarian law requires parties to armed conflicts to take the measures necessary to protect civilians, particularly children. This is an obligation that must be fully honoured by all parties. However, children are constantly subjected to a host of egregious violations. Meanwhile, children who are refugees, internally displaced or stateless as a result of conflicts are more likely to endure during armed conflicts such severe violations and other major abuses as recruitment and use, sexual violence, trafficking and detention.

According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493), children continued to face a high number of serious violations in 2021. The United Nations documented 23,982 grave violations, the most common of which were the killing and maiming of children, followed by the recruitment and use of children for military purposes, as well as cases of denial of humanitarian access to them.

Unfortunately, the Middle East, from Afghanistan to Yemen to Palestine, continues to confront such horrific violations against children. In Afghanistan, the United Nations confirmed 2,577 grave violations against 2,430 children in 2021, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction, recruitment, attacks on schools, particularly girls' schools, and the intimidation of school personnel. The Taliban should allow all Afghan children, including girls, to attend school. As Afghanistan's neighbour and host to millions of Afghan refugees, including children, Iran has provided basic services, such as education and health, for Afghan children living in Iran.

In Yemen, the United Nations recorded 2,748 serious violations against 800 children in 2021, a large number of whom were killed and maimed. Iran supports the truce agreement to end the suffering of the Yemeni people, including children.

The Israeli regime continues to commit the most systematic and flagrant violation of children's rights

in the Middle East. In 2021, the United Nations documented 2,934 grave violations against 1,208 Palestinian children in occupied Palestine and the Gaza Strip. According to the United Nations report, in 2021, the Israeli regime killed 86 and imprisoned 637 Palestinian children, 85 of whom suffered ill treatment and violation of due process by the Israeli regime while incarcerated, with 75 per cent reporting physical violence. Moreover, the United Nations verified 22 attacks on schools.

These atrocities constitute clear proof of the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The perpetrators of such heinous crimes must therefore be brought to justice.

In conclusion, putting an end to ongoing conflicts, preventing their re-emergence and guaranteeing the conflicting parties' full and effective compliance with international humanitarian law are all necessary to the protection of children in armed conflicts. Additionally, it is imperative to address conflicts' underlying causes. Children have frequently been recruited in conflicts to support their families financially. Furthermore, such problems as poverty, lack of access to quality education and employment opportunities, as well as illegal unilateral sanctions and economic blockades, continue to play a significant role in such grave violations. We urge the Secretary-General to conduct an assessment of the main causes of conflicts, focusing on the detrimental effects of unilateral sanctions on the protection of children in such situations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Mr. Maes (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg supports the statement of made observer of the European Union and those made on behalf of the Groups of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict and on the Responsibility to Protect. Allow me to complement those statements with some considerations in my national capacity.

We thank the Brazilian presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's important open debate and all the briefers for their insightful briefings. In this context, I would like to reiterate Luxembourg's full support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and stress the importance of strengthening the Office of the Special Representative and continuing to support the work of UNICEF.

The publication of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) and its consideration by the Security Council is a testament to the international community's continued commitment to the protection of children, a subject that remains ever relevant. Today's news is the Russian aggression against Ukraine. While waiting for the situation in Ukraine to be included in the next annual report, we take note of the fact that Ukraine has been added to the list of countries of concern, with immediate effect.

Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine has blatantly violated international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter. The relentless shelling of civilian targets, including schools and hospitals, by Russian military forces continues to cause numerous casualties among the population of Ukraine. Children are not spared.

On 21 March, the Group of Friends on Children and Sustainable Development, chaired by Bulgaria, Jamaica and Luxembourg, issued a joint statement lamenting the deaths of at least 75 children as a result of the war in Ukraine. As of 17 July, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 346 children have died in this conflict, and this figure is certainly lower than the actual number of dead children. Russia must immediately stop its indiscriminate attacks on densely populated areas, including schools and hospitals. We call on all States to sign and implement the Safe Schools Declaration, which provides a relevant framework for action.

We are also very concerned about reports of the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Children fleeing the war in Ukraine are at increased risk of human trafficking and exploitation. It is vital that these children are protected from becoming victims of war a second time.

In the light of the terrible suffering of the civilian population, and in particular of children, we regret that the Security Council is not in a position to condemn the war in Ukraine and adopt a draft resolution that could help put an end to it. That does not exonerate the perpetrators of war crimes. They will be held accountable for their actions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Brazil for organizing today's debate, and all the briefers for their valuable briefings.

“Children are both our reason to struggle to eliminate the worst aspects of warfare, and our best hope for succeeding at it.” (A/51/306, para. 6)

Those were the words of Graça Machel in her seminal report on the impact of armed conflict on children in 1996. Her words still ring true, as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) demonstrates. We are deeply concerned about the high number of grave violations against children. It is particularly alarming that sexual violence and abductions have increased by 20 per cent.

Switzerland would like to highlight three points. First, internally displaced children and children abroad are particularly vulnerable and exposed to grave violations. We have just heard some examples. Often, these children are also deprived of their fundamental rights, such as the right to education. Switzerland calls for the implementation of Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) which was introduced by Norway and the Niger, on the protection of education in conflict. We also call for the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration by all States.

Secondly, children associated with armed groups must be treated as victims. In line with resolution 2427 (2018), we call on all States Members of the United Nations to prioritize non-judicial measures focused on rehabilitation and reintegration and to use detention only as a last resort. Successful reintegration in turn contributes to sustainable peace. The Peacebuilding Commission should treat reintegration as a priority, also through the theme of mental health and psychosocial support, and keep the Council informed of its deliberations.

Thirdly, to protect children in conflict, it is urgent to preserve the independence, impartiality and credibility of the instruments at our disposal. The criteria for listing or delisting parties responsible for grave violations in the annexes to the annual report must be clear, consistent and objective. This year the Secretary-General added Mozambique, Ethiopia and, following the Russian aggression, Ukraine to the list of situations of concern and called for the strengthening of monitoring capacities in the central Sahel region. The situation of children in these new contexts, as in

all countries mentioned in the report, must receive the necessary attention from the Council.

Let us also ensure that there are sufficient human and financial resources for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on the ground everywhere. To that end, we call on the Council to include child-protection provisions in all relevant mandates and on Member States to allocate the necessary resources.

Switzerland calls on all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law and international refugee law. Graça Machel's aspiration must become a reality. As a future member of the Security Council, Switzerland will continue to work to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mrs. González (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to thank the Permanent Mission of Brazil for having convened this open debate and in particular to welcome the presence of the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Ambassador Fernando Simas. Uruguay is very pleased to see a representative of MERCOSUR presiding over the Council. We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter. We also welcome Ms. Catherine Russell of UNICEF and civil-society representative Patrick Kumi of the non-governmental organization Similar Ground for their valuable contributions.

We welcome the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, particularly with regard to the need for greater accountability and a comprehensive approach to the tasks of demobilization and reintegration into society.

Uruguay aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Botswana on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect and by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. We wish also to make a few remarks in our national capacity.

Children and young people are disproportionately affected by conflicts and atrocities. Serious violations against children, including recruitment, abductions, killings, maiming and rape or other form of sexual violence are atrocity crimes, and it is therefore

increasingly necessary to bolster our capacities to protect children and to put children and young people at the heart of efforts to protect children and their rights and needs. That must be central to all efforts for peace, including mediation and conflict prevention.

The prevailing impunity for serious violations is unacceptable. It is therefore urgent to adopt laws to criminalize serious violations at the national level; to adopt national accountability measures; to step up the cooperation of Member States with international, regional and national accountability mechanisms; and to continue to work to prevent violations through strategic commitments and specific prevention plans aimed at mitigating the effects of violence on children.

I should like in that regard to underline the need for Member States and regional organizations to bolster their capacities for child protection and commit to the United Nations in that regard, strengthening regional partnerships on children and armed conflict, specifically with the Special Representative and regional and subregional organizations.

The importance that Uruguay attaches to the children in armed conflict agenda is linked to its long-standing commitment to respect for and the promotion of the rights of the child, along with its long history of participation in United Nations peace operations and of carrying out tasks involving the protection of civilians, particularly children.

In that regard, to reaffirm what has already been stated, Uruguay was one of the main countries behind the creation of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in 2015, and we currently coordinate the Group's activities along with Belgium.

In early 2020, Uruguay adopted its child-protection policy for personnel deployed in peace operations, thus becoming the first country in the peacekeeping system to have a specific policy for the protection of children in conflict situations. My country received support from the United Kingdom, UNICEF and Keeping Children Safe in establishing that policy.

I would also like to underscore the launch by our country's Ministry of National Defence in November 2021 of a national guide for child-protection instructors in peacekeeping missions that includes chapters on training, prevention, detection, protection of the rights of victims, the drafting of reports and the screening of personnel prior to deployment.

It is also noteworthy that our national peacekeeping operations school offers courses on issues related to child and civilian protection in armed conflict, which has positioned our country as a regional centre for education, capacity-building and training.

In conclusion, Uruguay once again calls on those States that have not yet done so to adhere to the relevant protocols on the protection of children, including the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. We remain at the disposal of the United Nations and its membership to share our national experiences in that area and to continue working together closely on this agenda and, of course, with full commitment to this presidency.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Brazil for having convened this open debate, and I would highlight the statements made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as Mr. Patrick Kumi's moving testimony.

Ecuador aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and urges the international community to maximize efforts to promote and protect the rights of the child in all contexts.

The report of the Secretary-General, António Guterres, covering the period January to December 2021 (S/2022/493) once again shows that children in armed conflict constantly suffer serious violations of their rights, including sexual violence, killings, maiming, abductions and forced recruitment, among other intolerable acts of aggression. This is attested to, for example, in the reports of the Secretary-General S/2022/397 and S/2022/46, which state that displaced girls in confined living conditions are more vulnerable to sexual violence. The international community and the Security Council must pay particular attention to those specificities.

As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols, Ecuador

promotes a robust international architecture for the protection of the rights of the child in all situations, including in armed conflict, without any distinction on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, gender or any other status.

My country, Ecuador, is also committed to continuing to devote particular attention to the promotion and protection of the rights of children who have fled their homes. Given the difficulties involved in crossing borders in a safe, orderly and regular manner, many children who are fleeing zones of conflict or violence are exposed to criminal smuggling and trafficking networks.

I would underscore the increasing educational needs of refugee and displaced children, for whom it is urgent to adopt specific measures for the protection of schools, teaching personnel and pupils in line with international law and international humanitarian law, as well as to proscribe the use of educational facilities for military purposes.

All of that requires a coordinated response on the part of the United Nations, in which the Council has a central role to play, including the monitoring and implementation of the 13 resolutions on children and armed conflict, as underscored in the report of the Secretary-General.

No effort should be spared in freeing abducted and recruited children, and that must be accompanied by appropriate measures to reintegrate them into their communities, as highlighted during this meeting.

Finally, Ecuador has stated that the protection of children in armed conflict will be a priority during its membership of the Council in 2023 to 2024. It believes that the international community has a collective duty to strengthen its efforts to alleviate the suffering of the more than 400 million conflict-affected children throughout the world.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.