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Children and armed conflict in Yemen

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the second report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen. The report, which is based on verified information on the six grave violations against children committed by all parties to the conflict in Yemen, covers the period from 1 April 2013 to 31 December 2018.

Children did not start the war in Yemen, but they are paying the highest price. Throughout the reporting period, children in Yemen suffered the consequences of being exposed to a horrific war. All parties to the conflict have obligations under international humanitarian and international human rights law to protect children. Yet, children were exposed to brutal violence in their homes, in schools, in hospitals, at community events and in playgrounds – all of which are places where they should be afforded protection.

The United Nations verified 11,779 grave violations against children in Yemen during the reporting period. Killing and maiming was the most prevalent violation, primarily as a result of air strikes (47 per cent of the total number of incidents) and ground fighting (40 per cent). The recruitment and use of children remained considerably underreported, despite the high numbers of verified instances of their recruitment and use, primarily owing to security threats and the fear of retribution against monitors and communities. Schools and hospitals continued to be indiscriminately attacked and used for military purposes. Sexual violence also remained underreported owing to the stigmatization associated with that violation. Attacks against humanitarian facilities and personnel, as well as a lack of medical supplies, have been a constant characteristic of the conflict in Yemen.

The monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children remained severely constrained as a result of security threats and access restrictions, posing significant and progressively increasing challenges to the effective verification and reporting of grave violations against children in Yemen.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, which covers the period from 1 April 2013 to 31 December 2018, is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict. It documents grave violations against children committed by all parties to the conflict in Yemen and highlights trends and patterns of those violations, as well as progress made and challenges faced in ending and preventing grave violations since the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on 9 December 2013 of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen (S/AC.51/2013/3). Specific recommendations are also made to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict in Yemen. Perpetrators of grave violations are, where possible, identified in the report. In that regard, in annex I to my most recent report on children and armed conflict (A/72/865-S/2018/465), the government forces of Yemen, including the Yemeni Armed Forces, are listed for the recruitment and use of children, and the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen¹ for the killing and maiming of children.² Both parties are on list B, which includes parties that have put in place measures aimed at improving the protection of children. The Houthis/Ansar Allah, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula/Ansar al-Sharia, pro-government militias and the Security Belt Forces are listed for child recruitment and use, on list A, which includes parties that have not put in place measures to improve the protection of children. The Houthis are also listed for the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals.

2. The country task force on monitoring and reporting in Yemen, which was established in 2013, has faced significant challenges in monitoring, verifying and reporting grave child rights violations in areas of active fighting. Gathering information related to the recruitment and use of children by all parties to the conflict in areas under the respective control of those parties was particularly difficult, as monitors feared and faced reprisals such as arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, having been subject to such threats and intimidations should incidents of the recruitment and use of children be publicly reported. In some instances, monitors have been deprived of their liberty on the basis of allegations of providing intelligence to the opposing parties.

3. The information contained in the present report represents what the country task force was able to verify. The actual number of incidents and grave violations is believed to be much higher.

II. Overview of political and security developments

4. Conflict has intensified throughout the country since my first report on children and armed conflict in Yemen, which covered the period from July 2011 to March 2013 (S/2013/383), and which was considered by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in July 2013 (S/AC.51/2013/3). Since then, parties have changed and evolved into new alliances. New ones have emerged while others have dissolved or are no longer actively involved in the conflict. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant began operating in the southern and central governorates of Yemen at the end of 2014, in particular in Bayda', Abyan and Aden, which are areas in which Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula has been present since 2009. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula

¹ Formerly known as the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen (A/72/865-S/2018/465).

² The Coalition was previously listed for attacks on schools and hospitals and was delisted for this violation in 2018.

also operates in Lahij, Hadramawt and Ta'izz Governorates, which remain inaccessible for monitoring purposes owing to security constraints.

5. The Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council and its implementation mechanism brokered by the United Nations in November 2011 provided for a political transition, beginning with the immediate transfer of power from the then President of Yemen and leader of the General People's Congress, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to the then Vice-President, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and presidential elections in February 2012. The political transition entered a second phase in March 2013, which included, among other components, the National Dialogue Conference and the drafting of a new constitution on the basis of the outcomes of the Conference. While the Houthis were not a signatory to the Initiative and its implementation mechanism, the mechanism did provide for their participation in the Conference.

6. In 2013, while the National Dialogue Conference was in progress, clashes erupted between the Houthis and Salafists in Dammaj, Sa'dah Governorate, where the Dar al-Hadith madrasa was located. A ceasefire was eventually brokered by the President, Mr. Hadi, who deployed forces in Dammaj and evacuated all Salafist fighters and their families, as well as foreigners present in the area, to Aden and Sana'a. Following those events, in June and July 2014, the Houthis expanded their military operations to Amran Governorate and clashed with tribal groups backed by government forces loyal to the Yemeni Islah Party. Following the killing by the Houthis of the commander of the 310 brigade of the government forces of Yemen, Hamid al-Qushaibi, in July 2014, the Houthis subsequently consolidated their control over Sa'dah and Amran Governorates and advanced towards Sana'a Governorate, with the cooperation of the former President, Mr. Saleh. Attacks against schools by the warring parties, in particular in Amran and Sa'dah, increased sharply during that period.

7. In September 2014, the Houthis took over the capital Sana'a and, despite the signing of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement to enlarge Houthi representation in the Government, throughout the last quarter of 2014 the group extended its area of control over large parts of the country, including the broader Amanat al-Asimah Governorate.

8. In January 2015, the Houthis, backed by Mr. Saleh, rejected a draft constitution proposed by the transitional government and placed the President and Prime Minister under house arrest. In February 2015, the Houthis issued a constitutional declaration and took over governmental entities in Sana'a, dissolving the parliament and establishing a new Houthi-led presidential council, which was the turning point of the escalation of the conflict. Mr. Hadi managed to escape to Aden, in the southern part of the country. The Houthis and the forces affiliated with the General People's Congress continued advancing to the south, which resulted in clashes in Ta'izz Governorate. Upon the request of Mr. Hadi in March 2015, the Coalition launched Operation Decisive Storm against Houthi positions in Yemen. The military operation primarily consisted of air strikes and was subsequently followed by ground fighting between the Houthis and government-allied forces. In the same month, the President of the United States of America issued a statement announcing his authorization to provide logistical and intelligence support to the Coalition's operations in Yemen, responding to the request from the President of Yemen. Other international forces have been operating in Yemen in the context of military operations to counter Al-Qaida.

9. The rapid escalation of the conflict resulted in a sharp increase in the number of grave violations against children in Yemen, in particular in 2015, which was the year with the highest number of verified grave child rights violations during the reporting period. In 2015, the number of verified child casualties increased by more than

650 per cent compared with the previous year. In the same period, the number of children recruited and used by parties to the conflict increased by almost 500 per cent compared with the previous year.

10. Throughout 2016, the number of parties to the conflict directly or indirectly involved on the battlefield increased. Tribal militias, in particular in the southern and eastern parts of the country, were established, including the Hadrami Elite Forces and Shabwani Elite Forces, both of which began their offensive against Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, and the Security Belt Forces, which became affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council, a secessionist organization established in 2017 by the former Governor of Aden, Aydarus al-Zubaydi. Despite the temporary ceasefire from April to August 2016, during which the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen convened peace talks in Kuwait, ground fighting continued, and Coalition air strikes intensified, including in the northern border area, following the launch of rocket attacks by the Houthis from Yemen into Saudi Arabia, which also resulted in civilian casualties.

11. In 2017, tensions between the Houthis and Mr. Saleh intensified. On 29 November, the Houthis clashed with forces of the General People's Congress in and around the Al-Saleh mosque in Amanat al-Asimah for five days, culminating in the killing of Mr. Saleh by the Houthis on 4 December.

12. In January 2018, clashes broke out in Aden and in neighbouring governorates between forces loyal to Mr. Hadi and groups affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council. In April, the head of the supreme political council of the Houthis, Saleh al-Samad, was killed by a Coalition air strike in Hudaydah Governorate. In June, the government forces, backed by the Coalition, began a military offensive against the Houthis in Hudaydah Governorate, which expanded to Hajjah Governorate and was still ongoing at the time of writing. The protracted conflict has led to a rapid devaluation of the riyal and has had a major negative impact on the main ports through which commercial and humanitarian supplies enter Yemen.

13. Throughout the reporting period, the security situation increasingly worsened and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law continued. Ongoing clashes, air strikes and the use of explosive ordnance, guns and mortar shells in heavily populated civilian settlements continued to place children at extreme risk and to have a significant impact on civilian infrastructure, including schools and health facilities, as well as humanitarian facilities. At the time of writing, despite the significant achievement of the Stockholm Agreement reached as a result of the United Nations brokered peace talks in Sweden in December 2018, which included an immediate ceasefire covering Hudaydah Governorate and the mutual redeployment of forces from the city and the three ports (Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa) to agreed locations outside the city and the ports, a commitment not to bring any military reinforcements into the city, the three ports and the Governorate and a commitment to remove any military manifestation from the city, fighting elsewhere in Yemen continued unabated.

14. The protracted conflict in Yemen has had major humanitarian consequences, with the severe economic decline bringing the country to the brink of famine and exacerbating needs. An estimated 80 per cent of the population – 24 million people – require some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 14.3 million who are in acute need. Access to potable water is extremely costly for the most vulnerable people living in Yemen, and 17.8 million people, of whom 50 per cent are children, do not have sufficient access to water, sanitation and hygiene services, in particular in rural areas. The worst cholera outbreak in the history of the country occurred in 2017, when more than a million suspected cases were reported between

April and December. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is the worst such crisis in the world.

III. Grave violations against children

15. During the reporting period, the United Nations verified 11,779 grave violations against children committed in Yemen and 625 cases involving other issues of concern affecting children, such as the deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with parties to the conflict and the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes. The number of grave violations progressively increased, with the highest number of verified violations in 2015, owing to the countrywide escalation of the conflict. The United Nations verified 272 grave violations in 2013 (from April onwards), 568 in 2014, 3,555 in 2015, 2,458 in 2016, 2,539 in 2017 and 2,387 in 2018.

16. The monitoring and verification of grave violations against children has become progressively more difficult and has been severely constrained by security and access restrictions, posing significant challenges to the effective documentation and reporting of grave child rights violations, in particular with regard to the recruitment and use of children owing to the sensitivities around that specific violation and the fear of repercussions such as arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. For example, monitors and members of communities have been threatened with such repercussions, should incidents of the recruitment and use of children be publicly reported.

A. Recruitment and use

17. Between April 2013 and December 2018, the United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 3,034 children (3,018 boys and 16 girls) by parties to the conflict in Yemen. The vast majority (83 per cent) were boys between the ages of 15 and 17; however, the United Nations verified the recruitment and use of children as young as 10 by the Houthis and the popular committees. A steady increase was documented until 2015 and from 2016 to 2017, despite major access restrictions for monitoring purposes: 91 children were verified as recruited and used from April to December 2013, 156 in 2014, 915 in 2015, 606 in 2016, 896 in 2017 and 370 in 2018.

18. Verified incidents were attributed to the Houthis (1,940), the popular committees (317), the government forces of Yemen (274), the Security Belt Forces (189), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (148), the Salafists (65), Ansar al-Sharia (30), the Shabwani Elite Forces (26), the Yemeni Islah Party (17), the Hiraq Southern Movement (13), the Hadrami Elite Forces (6), tribal groups (4), unidentified groups (3), Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant operating in Yemen (1) and forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council (1). The Houthis and the popular committees were among the parties recruiting children as young as 10 years old.

19. Over the years, children have become increasingly vulnerable to recruitment and use by all parties to the conflict as a result of the ongoing and intensifying conflict and as parties have asserted their control over parts of the territory. Increasing poverty and limited access to education, vocational training and livelihood opportunities were also key drivers of child recruitment and use. Children joined parties to the conflict in order to provide financial support to their families, who were often obliged to rely on income earned by their children to be able to buy food and other basic essential items. Religious beliefs and ideologies have also influenced children and encouraged some of them to enlist with various parties to the conflict.

20. More than 700 boys between the ages of 15 and 17 who joined armed forces and armed groups were used on the front lines as active combatants, meaning that, out of the total number of children recruited and used, 25 per cent served in a combat role on the front line. The other children were used for operating checkpoints, patrolling, guarding military and governmental facilities and fetching water, food and equipment for parties to the conflict. A total of 274 boys were killed or maimed (171 and 103, respectively) while fighting, operating checkpoints or delivering supplies to fighters.

21. The majority of the children were recruited and used by the Houthis, as 1,940 (64 per cent) of the total number of cases were attributed to that group. In 2015, the number of incidents attributed to the Houthis increased exponentially, with 606 children verified as recruited and used in that year alone. Incidents of the recruitment and use of children by the Houthis were verified as having occurred in 20 governorates, mostly in Amanat al-Asimah (435), Ta'izz (238) and Amran (226). Since 2014, a heightened presence of children associated with the Houthis has been evident in all the governorates, operating checkpoints and travelling in military trucks. Children joined the group to secure income and other material support for their families. Other children were mobilized and recruited by the group while at school. As documented in my first report on children and armed conflict in Yemen, there is a culture of social acceptance among family members regarding the recruitment and use of children by the Houthis, which is perceived as a way to protect their land and their families from the enemies, and this has been further exacerbated since the beginning of the Coalition operations in 2015.

22. In 2018, the United Nations verified the recruitment and use by the Houthis of 16 girls between the ages of 14 and 17, which was the first time since the establishment of the country task force in Yemen in 2013 that such information was verified. Their main role was to mobilize and recruit other girls and encourage women and girls to send the male members of their families to the battlefield and support the fighters with money and prayers. Girls have also been seen carrying arms and sticks with the Houthi slogan and, in two separate incidents, the girls entered schools and encouraged the female students to support fighters and forced them to repeat the Houthi slogans.

23. The recruitment and use of children by the popular committees was also prevalent, with 317 incidents verified by the United Nations. The majority of the incidents were verified as having occurred in the Governorates of Dali' (68), Ta'izz (65) and Shabwah (46). Most of the children, ranging in age between 15 and 17 years old, joined the group with the hope of later being integrated into the government forces of Yemen and thereby receiving the monthly salary of approximately \$250, instead of the symbolic compensation provided by the popular committees of about \$120. For example, in June 2016 in Jawf Governorate, five armed boys wearing military uniforms were queueing inside a governmental building to receive their salary. Two of them, aged 16 and 17, had been recruited five months earlier by the popular committees. Both children had been sent to the battlefield to fight.

24. The government forces of Yemen recruited and used 274 boys, most of whom were recruited in the Governorates of Abyan (100), Jawf (38), Shabwah (29), Aden (24) and Dali' (23). Over 80 per cent of those children were recruited during 2017 (114) and 2018 (111). The lack of effective mechanisms for determining age and the intensification of the conflict, together with the lack of livelihood opportunities, have been identified as main factors in the increase in the number of children recruited and used by government forces. Families have been forced to send their children to the battlefield in order to be able to have an income.

25. Since their establishment in 2016, the Security Belt Forces have recruited and used 189 boys in the Governorates of Abyan (157), Lahij (25), Aden (4), Ta'izz (2) and Dali' (1). Most of those instances (145, or 77 per cent) were verified in 2017, when the group consolidated its control over most of the southern governorates, while the remaining 44 (23 per cent) were verified in 2018. In July 2017, for example, two brothers aged 14 and 15 dropped out of school when their father died and were subsequently recruited by the Security Belt Forces to guard the entrance to a military camp and to operate a checkpoint.

26. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula was responsible for the recruitment of 148 boys. Most of the instances were verified in 2015 and early 2016, when Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula conducted mobilization campaigns to encourage children through lectures and training camps to join the group. The recruitment was conducted in the Governorates of Shabwah (57), Aden (37), Abyan (26), Lahij (26), Dali' (1) and Hadramawt (1). In addition, 30 boys were recruited by Ansar al-Sharia in Abyan during 2016. The majority of the boys recruited by both groups were between 15 and 17 years old and were responsible for operating checkpoints and patrolling controlled areas.

27. The Salafists recruited and used 65 boys; the majority of the instances (57) were verified in 2013, when the group was actively recruiting children to participate in the hostilities against the Houthis in Dammaj. The majority of the children were recruited in the Governorate of Abyan (51), followed by the Governorates of Dali' (4), Bayda' (3), Amran (2), Lahij (2), Sa'dah (2) and Aden (1). Most of the children were recruited in mosques. Groups of children were transported by bus to fight in Sa'dah Governorate. In November 2013, for example, 21 boys between the ages of 15 and 17 were recruited by the group in Abyan Governorate to fight in Dammaj. The boys, who were recruited from several districts in Abyan, gathered at a meeting point in the Zinjibar district of Abyan and were later transported in pickup trucks to Sa'dah Governorate. The vehicles were attacked close to Sa'dah Governorate by the Houthis, resulting in five children being killed and 16 children being injured.

28. The United Nations received additional reports of the recruitment and use of children that it was not able to verify owing to the protection risks associated with monitoring and reporting that specific violation. Those fears were exacerbated by reports of executions and other types of threats, such as arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

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

29. During the reporting period, 340 boys, most of whom were between the ages of 15 and 17, were deprived of their liberty for their alleged association with opposing parties. A total of 9 instances were verified in 2013, 9 in 2014, 188 in 2015, 15 in 2016, 23 in 2017 and 96 in 2018. The majority of the children were deprived of their liberty by the popular committees (153), followed by the Houthis (72) and the Yemeni Armed Forces (54).

30. Most of the cases attributed to the popular committees (153) occurred in 2015, when the group captured and deprived of their liberty 141 children allegedly associated with the Houthis in Lahij, Abyan, Dali', Aden and Ta'izz Governorates. Of the 72 cases attributed to the Houthis, 53 were verified in 2018 upon the release of boys who were deprived of their liberty in Amanat al-Asimah Governorate for their alleged association with opposing parties.

31. Throughout the reporting period, the government forces of Yemen held 54 boys in detention for their alleged association with the Houthis. Following the advocacy of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and of the United Nations

in Yemen, at the time of writing, all children held by the Government of Yemen had been reunified with their families.

32. Lastly, the Security Belt Forces deprived 10 boys of their liberty in 2016 and 2017 in the Governorates of Abyan (5), Lahij (4) and Aden (1).

B. Killing and maiming

33. During the reporting period, the United Nations verified the killing of 2,776 children (1,940 boys, 787 girls and 49 children of unknown sex) and the maiming of 4,732 children (3,490 boys and 1,242 girls). The highest number of casualties were verified as having occurred in Ta'izz Governorate (1,828 children, comprising 539 killed and 1,289 maimed), representing 24 per cent of the total killed or maimed during the reporting period, followed by Sa'dah Governorate (1,186 children, comprising 624 killed and 562 maimed), representing 16 per cent, and Hudaydah Governorate (735 children, comprising 291 killed and 444 maimed), representing 10 per cent. The rapid escalation of the conflict resulted in a sharp increase in the number of children killed or maimed in Yemen, in particular in 2015, when the United Nations verified a major increase, with almost seven times the number of casualties verified during the previous year. Overall, 146 children were killed or injured from April to December 2013, 319 in 2014, 2,445 in 2015, 1,555 in 2016, 1,354 in 2017 and 1,689 in 2018. The majority of the child casualties were attributed to the Coalition (3,550 children, comprising 2,417 boys, 1,113 girls and 20 of unknown sex), followed by the Houthis (1,861 children, comprising 1,368 boys, 464 girls and 29 of unknown sex), unidentified parties to the conflict (1,297 children, comprising 1,037 boys and 260 girls), the government forces of Yemen (180 children, comprising 151 boys and 29 girls), the popular committees (154 children, comprising 128 boys and 26 girls), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (95 children, comprising 45 boys and 50 girls), Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant operating in Yemen (57 children, comprising 56 boys and 1 girl), other international forces fighting for the Government of Yemen (27 children, comprising 17 boys and 10 girls) and the Security Belt Forces (7 children, comprising 3 boys and 4 girls). The remaining casualties (280) were primarily the result of crossfire among various parties.

34. Almost half of the child casualties, 47 per cent, were a result of aerial attacks: 1,710 children (1,110 boys, 580 girls and 20 of unknown sex) were killed and 1,801 children (1,281 boys and 520 girls) were maimed in such attacks. The majority of those casualties were a result of Coalition air strikes, with 1,703 children (1,103 boys, 580 girls and 20 of unknown sex) killed and 1,794 children (1,277 boys and 517 girls) maimed. The remaining child casualties caused by aerial attacks were attributed to other international forces fighting for the Government of Yemen (seven boys killed and two boys and two girls maimed), and to the Yemeni Armed Forces (two boys and one girl maimed). The majority of the casualties resulting from air strikes were in Sa'dah Governorate (982), followed by the Governorates of Amanat al-Asimah (491), Hajjah (481), Ta'izz (371), Hudaydah (351), Sana'a (278) and Amran (161).

35. For example, in September 2014, a drone attributed to other international forces fighting for the Government of Yemen and targeting militants of Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula hit a vehicle in Jawf Governorate. A boy and two girls between the ages of 6 and 13 in proximity of the targeted militants were injured. In another example, on 15 March 2016, a Coalition air strike hit a market in the Mustaba' district of Hajjah Governorate, killing 23 boys and maiming 5 boys between the ages of 7 and 17. In some incidents, air strikes resulted in very large numbers of child casualties. For example, on 9 August 2018, in the Majz district of Sa'dah Governorate, 39 boys were killed and 47 boys were injured, all of whom were between the ages of 7 and

17, in a single incident in which a Coalition air strike hit a school bus transporting the children. The incident was subsequently publicly recognized by the Coalition.

36. Ground fighting, including the firing of small arms and shelling, was the second main cause of child casualties, affecting 2,947 children (40 per cent of the total killed or maimed). Of those children, 785 were killed and 2,162 were maimed. Close to half of the casualties (1,334 children) occurred in Ta'izz Governorate, followed by the Governorates of Hudaydah (285), Aden (269), Dali' (205), Sa'dah (121), Jawf (120), Lahij (114) and Amran (105). The majority of the child casualties resulting from ground fighting (62 per cent) were attributed to the Houthis, (1,833 children, comprising 458 killed and 1,375 maimed), followed by unidentified armed groups (439 children, comprising 109 killed and 330 maimed) and the government forces of Yemen (166 children, comprising 66 killed and 100 maimed).

37. Shelling in densely populated areas was prevalent. For example, in June 2016, in Ta'izz Governorate, 10 children between the ages of 1 and 12 were injured when two shells hit the house in which they were taking shelter. The incident took place during a period of intense and continuous shelling by the Houthis. In another example, in April 2017, a shell attributed to the popular committees fell on a civilian house in Jawf Governorate. The house was partially destroyed, resulting in the maiming of three girls and one boy, including a two-day-old baby.

38. Mines and unexploded ordnance represented the third leading cause of child casualties (728), resulting in 149 children being killed (123 boys and 26 girls) and 579 being injured (478 boys and 101 girls). Most of those incidents remained unattributed and took place in the Governorates of Ta'izz (109), Hudaydah (90), Sa'dah (83), Bayda' (59) and Lahij (58). For example, in December 2017, in Hudaydah Governorate, three families fleeing from Hudaydah to Aden in a vehicle drove over a landmine, resulting in the killing of four girls and the injury of four boys and five girls between the ages of 2 and 17. In another example, on 17 June 2018, in Hudaydah Governorate, a father and his four children (two boys and two girls) were riding a motorcycle while fleeing an area affected by crossfire between the Houthis and government forces of Yemen. The family drove over a landmine, resulting in the immediate killing of the father and his two sons (3 and 8 years old), while the two girls (10 and 15 years old) sustained injuries. Owing to ongoing clashes in the area, medical assistance did not reach the girls until the next morning, which resulted in the death of the 10-year-old girl. The 15-year-old girl witnessed her entire family die beside her as she was waiting to be rescued.

39. A further 146 child casualties resulted from suicide attacks, during which 59 children were killed (51 boys and 8 girls) and 87 were injured (76 boys and 11 girls). The casualties were attributed to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant operating in Yemen (57), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (50), unidentified armed groups (38) and Ansar al-Sharia (1). For example, in March 2015, in Amanat al-Asimah Governorate, four individuals associated with Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and bearing improvised explosive devices detonated the devices inside two mosques at the same time. The attack resulted in more than 100 civilian casualties, including 32 boys. A further 76 child casualties, resulting in 27 children being killed and 49 being injured, were caused by improvised explosive devices. Incidents were attributed to Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (37) and unidentified armed groups (39). The remaining 100 child casualties were a result of other types of explosions.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

40. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children were vastly underreported throughout the reporting period, primarily owing to fear and

stigmatization associated with that violation, as well as a lack of appropriate services for survivors in facilities where they would be willing to seek assistance.

41. The United Nations verified 11 incidents of sexual violence, affecting nine boys and two girls between the ages of 9 and 17, of which 1 was verified in 2013, 1 in 2015 and 9 in 2018. Incidents were attributed to the government forces of Yemen (7), the popular committees (3) and the Houthis (1). Some of the boys who survived sexual violence reported having been raped multiple times and subjected to threats should they report the violation and seek support. The incidents were reported in the Governorates of Ta'izz (5), Abyan (2), Aden (2), Amran (1) and Amanat al-Asimah (1).

42. The United Nations verified an increase in the early marriage of girls, which was a major concern in Yemen prior to the conflict, as a negative coping mechanism. The increase is believed to be due to the economic hardship that families are facing, a lack of protection and security and the breakdown of the rule of law, which results in widespread impunity.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

43. A total of 381 attacks on schools (244) and hospitals (137) were verified by the United Nations during the reporting period: 18 attacks were verified from April to December 2013 (13 on schools and 5 on hospitals); 50 were verified in 2014 (37 on schools and 13 on hospitals); 160 were verified in 2015 (95 on schools and 65 on hospitals); 73 were verified in 2016 (48 on schools and 25 on hospitals); 36 were verified in 2017 (23 on schools and 13 on hospitals); and 44 were verified in 2018 (28 on schools and 16 on hospitals). Close to half (42 per cent) of the attacks were carried out during the escalation of fighting in 2015, primarily in the Governorates of Sa'dah and Ta'izz, and could only be verified by the United Nations in subsequent years, primarily owing to access limitations. The majority of the attacks, 91 per cent, caused the partial or complete destruction of schools or hospitals (345), while the remaining 9 per cent involved threats of attacks on schools and hospitals, including intimidation (15), attacks on medical personnel and/or patients (14), looting of and theft of items from schools and hospitals (4) and attacks on teachers and/or students (3).

Attacks on schools

44. During the reporting period, the United Nations verified 244 attacks on schools, 140 of which were attributed to the Coalition, 43 to the Houthis, 28 to unidentified armed forces and groups, 11 to the government forces of Yemen, 6 to crossfire between the government forces of Yemen and the Houthis, 4 to the Salafists, 3 to the Hiram Southern Movement, 3 to crossfire between the Houthis and the popular committees, 3 to crossfire between the Houthis and the Salafists, 2 to the popular committees and 1 to crossfire between the Houthis and the Yemeni Islah Party. The majority of the attacks were carried out in the Governorates of Sa'dah (60), Amanat al-Asimah (31) and Ta'izz (24).

45. For example, on three occasions in September 2015, a school in Hudaydah, which was not being used for military purposes, was hit by air strikes attributed to the Coalition. In the first attack, the school was hit by three consecutive missiles. The second attack was carried out the following day, destroying the school bathrooms, and the third attack was carried out a week later, when four missiles hit the school, resulting in its total destruction. In other similar instances, individual schools were repeatedly targets of multiple air strikes.

46. Other types of attacks involved the Houthis storming into schools, forcing the teachers and the students to repeat Houthi slogans and threatening those who refused to comply. Some of the schools were also closed by the Houthis. For example, in January 2018 in Sa'dah, the group closed a school, threatening to arrest teachers and other school employees should they reopen the school without their permission.

Use of schools for military purposes

47. The United Nations verified the use of 258 schools for military purposes. That number is higher than the overall number of schools attacked. Most of the schools used for military purposes were in the Governorates of Ta'izz (64), Amran (44) and Sa'dah (31). The majority of the incidents were attributed to the Houthis (187), whereby 21 schools were used specifically for recruitment and propaganda, as well as to train boys and girls on fighting methodologies and how to assemble and dismantle weapons. The remaining schools were used for military purposes by the popular committees (27), unidentified armed groups (16), the government forces of Yemen (10), the Yemeni Islah Party (7), the Salafists (6), the Security Belt Forces (3), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (1) and Ansar-al-Sharia (1). Of those 258 schools, 58 were subsequently attacked, leading to the partial or complete destruction of the facility.

Attacks on hospitals

48. During the reporting period, the United Nations verified 137 attacks on hospitals, 53 of which were attributed to the Coalition, 43 to the Houthis, 17 to unidentified armed forces and groups, 8 to the government forces of Yemen, 7 to the popular committees, 3 to crossfire between the government forces of Yemen and the Houthis, 2 to the Security Belt Forces, 2 to Ansar al-Sharia, 1 to Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and 1 to crossfire between the Houthis and the popular committees. Most of the attacks on hospitals were carried out in the Governorates of Ta'izz (64), Amran (44) and Jawf (3).

49. Attacks on hospitals and ambulances in densely populated areas attributed to the Coalition led to severe civilian casualties. In January 2016, for example, a Coalition air strike initially hit a civilian area in Sa'dah Governorate. Immediately after the attack, people from the surrounding area rushed to help the wounded and an ambulance arrived to transfer the wounded to nearby hospitals, when a second air strike hit the same location, resulting in the death of several civilians, including the medical attendant and the ambulance driver.

50. In another example, in July 2015, the Houthis broke into a hospital in Ta'izz Governorate following armed clashes with the popular committees in the same area. Some members of the group attacked the hospital manager, two staff and a patient, as they demanded to be given videotapes that captured the clashes with the popular committees. The Houthis later evacuated the patients and shut down the health facility.

51. Some hospitals have also been attacked several times throughout the reporting period. For example, Thawrah hospital in Ta'izz Governorate was attacked on multiple occasions during 2015. The Houthis were implicated in 9 of the 15 attacks that led to the partial destruction of the hospital and its equipment. The attribution of the remaining six attacks on the hospital could not be verified.

Use of hospitals for military purposes

52. The United Nations verified the use of 27 hospitals for military purposes. Most of the hospitals used for military purposes were in the Governorates of Ta'izz (6), Aden (4) and Jawf (3). The vast majority of those instances were attributed to the

Houthis (20), followed by the popular committees (4), the government forces of Yemen (1), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (1) and Ansar al-Sharia (1). Of the 27 hospitals, 12 were subsequently attacked, leading to the partial or complete destruction of the facility.

E. Abduction

53. The monitoring and verification of abductions of children remained limited. The main purposes of abductions are recruitment and use, other forms of exploitation and ransom. In the reporting period, 17 boys between the ages of 10 and 17 were verified as having been abducted: 11 boys in 2015, 4 in 2016 and 2 in 2017. Parties responsible for the abduction of the children included the Houthis (12) and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (2). Responsibility for the remaining three abductions could not be attributed.

54. Among the incidents attributed to the Houthis, four involved boys who were abducted by the Houthis and later deployed to fight on the battlefield against opposing parties. Two of the boys were later found dead in Dali' Governorate. In another example, a 10-year-old boy was abducted for ransom by Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula in Bayda' Governorate.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

55. The humanitarian situation in Yemen deteriorated throughout the years covered in the present report, with far-reaching consequences for the life, survival and well-being of millions of children. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the conflict in Yemen is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The lack of humanitarian access for children has been a constant feature of the conflict, as limited or no access has been granted to humanitarian actors and populations in need have been suffering from limited or no access to supplies.

56. During the reporting period, the United Nations verified 828 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, representing an exponential increase as a result of the intensification of the conflict. Of those incidents, 16 were verified from April to December 2013, 43 in 2014, 23 in 2015, 220 in 2016, 251 in 2017 and 275 in 2018.

57. Among the incidents of denial of humanitarian access, 59 per cent involved restrictions of movement within the country (492), most of which occurred in the Governorates of Hudaydah (94), Sana'a (77), Ta'izz (54), Sa'dah (47) and Ibb (45). Approximately 86 per cent of the total number of incidents involving restrictions of movement were attributed to the Houthis (423), followed by the Coalition (32), the government forces of Yemen (23), unidentified armed groups (8), the popular committees (4) and the Hiraq Southern Movement (2). In September 2015, for example, the Houthis confiscated food baskets in Jawf Governorate and prevented humanitarian workers from distributing the supplies to people in need.

58. Violence against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities was the second most common type of incident involving the denial of humanitarian access (with a total of 192 incidents). The majority of the incidents took place in the Governorates of Ta'izz (48), Hudaydah (32), Hajjah (16) and Amran (13). Of the total number of incidents, 81 were attributed to unidentified armed groups, 68 to the Houthis, 18 to the government forces of Yemen, 17 to the Coalition, 6 to the popular committees and 2 to Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. For example, in April 2015, a Coalition air strike hit an international non-governmental organization warehouse containing humanitarian aid.

59. The United Nations also verified 111 incidents of interference in the implementation of humanitarian assistance, 89 of which were attributed to the Houthis, 13 to the Coalition, 5 to unidentified armed groups and 4 to the government forces of Yemen. The majority of those incidents were carried out in the Governorates of Hudaydah (24), Sana'a (23), Ta'izz (11) and Ibb (9).

60. A total of 25 incidents of movement restrictions imposed on organizations, personnel or goods into Yemen were verified. Those incidents were attributed to the Yemeni Armed Forces (10), the Coalition (10) and the Houthis (5) and were carried out in the Governorates of Aden (12), Sana'a (6), Hudaydah (5), Ibb (1) and Hadramawt (1).

61. The United Nations verified eight attacks on water reservoirs, which deprived surrounding communities of access to water. Seven of those attacks were attributed to the Coalition and one to the Houthis. For example, in September 2017, a Coalition air strike hit a water reservoir in Sa'dah Governorate that provided water to 4,000 individuals.

IV. Advocacy and dialogue with parties to the conflict

62. During the reporting period, the United Nations continued and increased its engagement with all parties to the conflict in Yemen, including for the purpose of developing and implementing action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children.

63. The Government of Yemen confirmed its commitment to ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by its forces through the signature of an action plan with the United Nations on 14 May 2014. In June of the same year, a joint technical committee was established to facilitate the implementation of the action plan and monitor its progress. However, three months later, the committee suspended its work following the takeover by the Houthis of all government entities in Sana'a. The intensification of the conflict that followed stalled the implementation of the action plan.

64. In October 2017, the Government of Yemen endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, and its dialogue with the United Nations on the revitalization of the action plan resumed and led to new developments over the following year. In March 2018, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Yemeni Armed Forces issued a command order recalling that the recruitment and use of children by government forces was forbidden. The order also called for the immediate reporting of any violation of its provisions to the relevant authorities. In addition, the Government jointly developed with the United Nations a road map to revitalize the implementation of the action plan. The road map, signed on 18 December 2018, focuses on the prevention of the recruitment of children through short- and long-term activities. Among the various provisions, the road map includes the development of standard operating procedures for the handover and release of children associated with the government forces of Yemen and to facilitate their reintegration into the community.

65. The United Nations continued its engagement with the Houthis to end and prevent grave violations, including through the adoption of an action plan to end and prevent all grave violations. Progress has been made in engaging with the de facto Houthi authorities to raise their awareness of protecting children's rights, and specifically of addressing the six grave violations, including through training sessions and other capacity-building opportunities. At the time of writing, the United Nations had not established an action plan with the Houthis, but dialogue was ongoing.

66. As an important aspect of its ongoing advocacy with parties to the conflict in Yemen, as well as with Member States supporting any of the parties, the United Nations in Yemen sent periodic letters calling for compliance with the parties' obligations under international law. A summary of verified violations attributed to the specific party concerned was included in the letters, and the importance of establishing an action plan with the United Nations was also reiterated therein.

67. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has engaged with the members of the Coalition since 2017 through the visits of experts, the exchange of letters and the provision of information and guidance to strengthen the measures put in place by the Coalition in 2017 and 2018. In addition, the Office of the Special Representative conducted a first mission to the Coalition headquarters in Riyadh in October 2017 to identify gaps and develop recommendations to strengthen the preventive measures established by the Coalition at its headquarters, which include a child protection unit that was established upon the recommendation of my Special Representative in 2017. Since 2018, regular technical and high-level meetings with the Coalition have been held in order to develop measures to improve the protection of children in Yemen, which resulted in the signature of a memorandum of understanding between the United Nations and the Coalition in March 2019.

V. Observations and recommendations

68. Children did not start the war in Yemen, but they are paying the highest price. Throughout the period of almost six years covered in the present report, children have been the primary victims of the conflict in Yemen. The recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, attacks on hospitals and schools and the denial of humanitarian access for children have been constant features. I am deeply disturbed by the impact that this protracted armed conflict has had, and continues to have, on children. While I welcome the measures that have been put in place by some of the parties to the conflict in order to mitigate violations, the number of grave violations against children remains unacceptable. I strongly urge all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and to immediately take all actions necessary to protect children in Yemen, including by ensuring that preventive and mitigating measures are in place during the conduct of military operations. Perpetrators must be held accountable for the suffering of the civilian population in Yemen, and in particular for the suffering of children. Impunity has been a constant feature of the conflict.

69. I am encouraged by the endorsement in December 2018 by the Government of Yemen of a road map for the revitalization of the action plan signed with the United Nations in 2014 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the government forces. Nevertheless, I am concerned about the continuing high number of children verified as recruited by the government forces. I urge the Government to proceed immediately with the implementation of the road map and to stop and prevent the recruitment and use of children, to release immediately all the children within its ranks and to prioritize the establishment of effective mechanisms for determining age.

70. I welcome the engagement of my Special Representative with the Coalition, which resulted in the signature by the United Nations and the Coalition, on 25 March 2019, of a memorandum of understanding on strengthening the protection of children affected by the armed conflict in Yemen. The agreement includes the development of specific time-bound activities aimed at preventing grave violations against children in the context of the Coalition's military operations in Yemen. I urge the Coalition to continue working with my Special Representative to implement all preventive activities in a timely and effective manner and to further enhance the protective

measures it established to prevent grave violations in the context of its military operations in Yemen. I further call upon all States that are parties to the conflict, including Yemen and the member States of the Coalition, to ensure that all incidents or allegations of incidents attributed to the Coalition are duly investigated, in line with international law.

71. I welcome the engagement of the Houthis with the United Nations in Yemen, including their commitment to be trained on international humanitarian law and the protection of children in armed conflict. I am deeply concerned about the continuing high number of children verified as having been recruited by the Houthis. In that regard, I urge the Houthis to enhance their dialogue with the United Nations in Yemen and immediately take all actions necessary to meet their obligations under international law, as well as to develop an action plan to end and prevent grave violations against children.

72. The number of grave violations against children as a result of hostilities is distressing, as is the number of children recruited and used by parties to the conflict, some of those children being as young as 10 years old. Continuing fighting across the country resulted in worsening patterns of grave violations committed against children by all parties to the conflict in Yemen. Homes, schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructures have been destroyed, leaving civilians, in particular children, in extremely dire conditions and displaced.

73. I call upon all parties to the conflict listed in annex I to my report on children and armed conflict ([A/72/865-S/2018/465](#)) to establish an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children, if they have not yet done so.

74. I remind all parties that all children below the age of 18 recruited and used by armed forces and groups must be immediately released, without exception. I am particularly alarmed about the verified recruitment and use of girls as an emerging trend, especially considering that the violation remains underreported. Family and community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to the conflict is essential to provide a future for those children and their families, as well as to prevent the risk of re-recruitment.

75. I urge all parties to halt the deprivation of the liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed forces and armed groups encountered in the context of military operations and to immediately release all children held on such charges. Children associated with parties to the conflict must be treated primarily as victims, and detention should be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest time possible, in line with international juvenile justice principles and the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. In that regard, I call upon all parties to enhance their engagement with the United Nations to develop and adopt standard operating procedures for the release and reintegration of children associated with parties to the conflict and grant immediate access to civilian child protection actors to facilitate the release and reintegration of those children into their communities.

76. I urge all parties to the conflict to immediately cease all military operations in civilian areas and more specifically operations on facilities such as schools and hospitals, as well as other elements of civilian infrastructure that are essential for the survival of the population in Yemen. I also call upon all parties to vacate the hospitals and schools that they are using for military purposes and to stop threats and attacks against teachers and medical personnel.

77. I am deeply concerned about the denial of humanitarian access for children in Yemen. I urge all parties to allow and facilitate sustained, rapid and unimpeded

humanitarian access to populations in need, specifically children, including unimpeded access to health services and immunization for children. I also call upon all parties to the conflict to immediately halt threats against monitors of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict and against communities in which grave violations are being verified, and to allow safe and unimpeded access for monitoring purposes.

78. I welcome the progress made towards ending the conflict that is the root cause of this unprecedented suffering. I urge all parties to continue their negotiations and to choose the path to lasting peace in Yemen. It is of utmost importance for all parties involved in the conflict to find a political solution and ensure that child protection provisions are integrated into all aspects of the ongoing peace negotiations, in line with Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#). It is also critical to ensure the provision of long-term financial support for child protection programmes, in particular to ensure the sustainability of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with parties to the conflict, including psychosocial support services, as well as to financially support the United Nations on the ground so that it may continue to implement child protection programmes for all children affected by the armed conflict in Yemen.
