



# Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

**8591**<sup>st</sup> meeting

Friday, 2 August 2019, 10.15 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

*President:* Mr. Czaputowicz/Ms. Wroniecka . . . . . (Poland)

*Members:*

Belgium . . . . .	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
Côte d'Ivoire . . . . .	Mr. Ipo
Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mrs. Cedano
Equatorial Guinea . . . . .	Mr. Ndong Mba
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Germany . . . . .	Mr. Schulz
Indonesia . . . . .	Mr. Syihab
Kuwait . . . . .	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru . . . . .	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
South Africa . . . . .	Mr. Matjila
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Pierce
United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Norman-Chalet

## Agenda

### Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509)

Letter dated 30 July 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/605)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 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/2019/509)**

#### **Letter dated 30 July 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/605)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Georgia, Guatemala, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Viet Nam and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund; Ms. Mariatu Kamara, UNICEF Canada Ambassador; and Mr. Majok Peter Awan, child protection professional.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the

following individuals to participate in this meeting: Mr. Gerton van den Akker, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and Ms. Clare Hutchinson, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this 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/2019/509, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict, and document S/2019/605, which contains a letter dated 30 July 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Poland addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to Ms. Gamba.

**Ms. Gamba:** On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to thank the Republic of Poland, and Foreign Minister Czaputowicz personally, for holding this open debate. It is vitally important that we take this opportunity to come together and focus on the current plight of children affected by armed conflict across the four corners of the globe.

As many in the Chamber will be aware, 2019 marks 20 years since the Security Council first adopted a resolution on children and armed conflict (resolution 1261 (1999)) and the 30th anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The date of 4 August is also the 10th anniversary of the adoption resolution 1882 (2009), in which this organ decided it was necessary to increase the focus of the children and armed conflict mandate on killing, maiming and rape and other forms of sexual violence. Today's debate therefore provides a milestone where we can take stock of our collective efforts to date.

Given these important anniversaries, I am very pleased that we have Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan here today to provide us with their insight from their experiences in Sierra Leone and South Sudan. I hope that they will both talk about the impact of conflict of

children and also inspire us with guidance. We need to better understand how we can build upon and improve the current work on the ground and better utilize child protection expertise to end and prevent violations. I extend a very special thank you to Peter and Mariatu for being here today.

To give my own insight, last month I travelled to Mali to assess first-hand the situation of children and advocate for increased protection measures for boys and girls. My visit was the first of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to the country. I travelled to Mopti, in the centre of the country, a region recently affected by dramatic spikes of violence. I met representatives of the authorities, child victims of the conflict and members of the Dogon and Peul communities. Time constraints meant that a joint meeting with representatives of the two communities was necessary, and it was held. This format led to a very constructive engagement. I was struck by their common recognition of the importance of protecting children from violence. It was clear to me that the protection of children can act as a confidence-building measure between opposing parties. It can demonstrably and positively impact peace processes and agreements, as we recently saw with the commitments of the two groups to ceasing hostilities last week.

This trip focused on the fundamentals of the mandate I represent. Over the time I have been Special Representative, I have expended much energy in engaging with parties to conflict where there is a willingness to engage. This has inspired positive results. In many situations where the monitoring and reporting mechanism has been in place, Governments have put in place clear measures, such as establishing interministerial committees to interact with the country task force, or passed laws on the protection of children. This has galvanized action and allowed progress to develop quickly as a direct result of high-level engagement. The formula will work with our teams on the ground.

Action plans are perhaps the most tangible example of the outcome of such engagement with parties to conflict. In recent months, three new action plans have been signed with non-State actors and other engagement tools have been put in place. However, we understand that these tools are only the beginning of a process to better protect children. They are not an end in themselves. I take this opportunity to call on all concerned Governments and on all those who

can provide support, including the Council, to do their utmost to ensure the full implementation of these commitments. When we have worked together effectively, we will see real tangible progress through a reduction of violations and the release of children.

Regional and subregional work is a key element of this direct engagement. I take this opportunity to thank the Council for giving us the tools last year, within the context of resolution 2427 (2018), to pursue prevention plans with these entities. I hope that soon we will have new instruments in these forums to aid our other engagement on the protection of children. This high-level political engagement supports the cornerstone of our endeavours — child protection efforts in situations of armed conflict. Access and actors in the field must be the priority to protect children and prevent violations. We cannot achieve anything without the tireless work on the ground of so many colleagues and partners — the sterling work of UNICEF in particular.

For our part, in late 2018 I launched the ACT to Protect campaign with the African and European Unions. This campaign is aimed at supporting the work on the ground and has already been launched in Mali and utilized in Somalia. I hope that we can count on the support of the Security Council and individual Member States as we push to create a tangible difference for all children affected by the six grave violations.

Unfortunately, for all our efforts to date we are not yet at a point where we can be confident that the situation is improving year upon year. The report before the Council (S/2019/509) speaks for itself. Although we have fewer violations across four categories, we have an increase in killing and maiming and similar levels of sexual violence. In last year's report (S/2018/465) two figures stand at very high levels: one for killing and maiming, with over 12,000 children affected by these violations, and one for children who benefitted from reintegration assistance — over 13,500. That, too was a historic high. Let me refer to both.

In 2018, verified cases of children killed and maimed reached record levels since the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. I echo the Secretary-General's concern that unprecedented numbers of violations were attributed to national and international forces. It is vital that the Council redouble its efforts to ensure that all parties abide by the principals of distinction, proportionality and military necessity. We must make sure that all military actions

are guided by the fundamental tenets of international humanitarian law. In this regard, I urge parties to conflict issue specific command orders that address reducing child casualties. This will help us uphold the spirit of this Council when it adopted resolution 1882 (2009) and recognized that more need to be done to stop killing and maiming of boys and girls.

About 40 per cent of the casualties in the global figure are caused by unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices and landmines. This a real preoccupation of my Office, particularly as they cause long-term and serious disability. I believe this is one area where quick wins can be made if there is a focus and a will on the part of the international community to reduce the use and clear up these explosive remnants of war when peace agreements have been reached. I hope that next year we can see a reduction in these types of casualties. Of course, overall the majority of cases are ascribed to armed groups, crossfire and violent ground engagements.

While the other topic that the Council addressed 10 years ago in resolution 1882 (200) is not as numerically startling at first glance, we still have a long way to go in tackling this issue. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are significantly underreported, including when perpetrated against boys. The fear of stigma and retaliation, involvement of powerful perpetrators, lack of services and concerns for the protection of survivors and witnesses discourage children and witnesses from coming forward. It is clear that, unfortunately, this violation has proved difficult to address. I believe that greater accountability mechanisms and adapted responsive care services for survivors can contribute to making significant progress in addressing this issue.

Moreover, too many children continue to be detained as a result of conflict. I urge that children exposed to alarming levels of violence not be further ostracized once released from armed groups and armed forces. We must allow these children to be considered as what they are — victims of a conflict. This is particularly true for the most vulnerable ones, such as children currently or allegedly associated with foreign fighters. I would like to reiterate the message of the Secretary-General that no child should be deprived of a nationality. In this year of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is pertinent to recall that actions for all children affected by armed conflict should be taken with the best interests of the child in mind.

The facts contained in the report serve to emphasize my reoccurring point. We need to prioritize action on the ground and also protect the staff who undertake it. In 2018, conflict and military operations, insecurity, constraints on humanitarian access, staff reductions, threats, violence and infrastructure prevented child protection actors from doing their most fundamental mission of protecting children. I ask the Council and individual member States to work with us to address this issue by emphasizing the need for humanitarian access in resolutions and bilateral relations. Child protection actors need to have access to provide life-saving support to victims and survivors of violations. We can strain every sinew at the highest level to prevent violations, but we also need to be able to respond quickly to violations when they occur.

Notwithstanding the restrictions on access, I am pleased that a high number of children have been separated from parties to conflict and provided with reintegration assistance. These releases have occurred due to the engagement of child protection actors as part of the development of action plans or as a result of emerging peace processes, mediation and dialogue between Governments and armed groups. It is therefore important for me to reiterate that these figures justify the extensive effort in engaging with joint action plans with all parties to conflict, as well as promoting child and armed conflict language and concerns at the heart of all peace dialogue and processes. Separating children provides opportunities for boys and girls to be given a second chance at life. We must ensure more dialogue and more engagement.

By the same token, we must also ensure that we are ready to receive released children appropriately through adequate and comprehensive programmes that are funded and readily available. We cannot afford to lose children once they are released and we cannot afford to make them wait their turn for reintegration assistance because of a lack of resources. That is why reintegration and considering the real reintegration needs of boys and girls globally is so urgent. I would like to thank Poland for the priority it has given to the task through its important role in the Group of Friends of Reintegration of Child Soldiers, which was launched by my Office, together with UNICEF, in late 2018.

I would like to end by imploring the Council to support the mandate to the greatest extent possible. We need the Council's support to engage with parties to conflict to end and prevent violations. We need its

support to ensure that there is sufficient pressure to make commitments mean something. Most of all, we need the Council's support to ensure that there exists the requisite child protection capacity to give children affected by conflict all the support they need — their one chance.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Gamba for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Fore.

**Ms. Fore:** I join the members of the Security Council today in our shared and steadfast commitment to protect children affected by armed conflict, prevent their physical and psychological harm and provide them with a future. First, however, we must face facts. As Special Representative Gamba noted, there were more than 24,000 documented violations against children in armed conflict in 2018 — up from 21,000 the year before. Half of those violations involved the killing or maiming of children. Those are just the verified incidents; the numbers are higher. We must do better.

We at UNICEF are deeply distressed about the continued and rampant use of explosive weapons and their impact on children. Air strikes, landmines, improvised explosive devices, rocket attacks, cluster munitions and artillery shelling cause the great majority of child casualties in armed conflict today. We know too that children account for more than two thirds of all civilians killed or maimed by explosive remnants of war. Their bodies are small and fragile and they are attracted by the shiny coloured metals. Not only are children harmed in disproportionate numbers because of their size and other factors, the severity of the harm must be borne in mind. They are also much more likely than adults to be disabled or killed as a result of blast injuries.

Those appalling facts speak for themselves. Ten years after the Security Council adopted resolution 1882 (2009), the facts tell us that we have miles to go to end grave violations against children in armed conflict. But they do not tell the whole story. There is so much we can do, and so much we are doing, to come to the aid of children at risk. Day in and day out, UNICEF and our many partners work with courageous and resilient children and young people in conflict zones around the world. They give us hope for the future — theirs and ours.

Let me tell members about two of them. Saja is a 13-year-old from Aleppo who has spent half her life

living in conflict. In recent years, she lost her home, her brother and several other loved ones. She also lost her left leg to a bomb. But she has not lost hope. Every day, she makes the long walk to school to continue her education. Saja says that her most prized possession is her prosthetic leg. She was an aspiring gymnast before losing her leg and still practices flips in her family's tiny apartment. Her wonderful new dream is to compete in the Paralympic Games.

Then there is Fatima, a young girl I met at a social support centre in Aden where we provide psychosocial support for young people. Fatima talked to me about fleeing the terrible violence in her hometown. She said she was now learning to reconnect with her peers and showed me a drawing that she had just made. It was a picture of a girl and her girlfriend sitting in a park on a sunny day. Staff members at the centre later told me that, when Fatima first arrived she drew pictures of only guns and blood, but that she had begun to heal.

In 2018, UNICEF reached 6.9 million children and adolescents like Saja with emergency education in humanitarian crises. We focused greater attention on the needs of children living with disabilities in the midst of conflicts. To help prevent disabilities from explosive remnants of war, we worked on risk education programmes in places such as Syria, Mali and Myanmar. Simple posters and leaflets could mean the difference between life, death or disability for children in conflict areas.

Also last year, UNICEF provided 3.6 million children and adolescents like Fatima with psychosocial support to help them cope with trauma and regain the childhood that they deserve. But we must do even more to meet the mental health needs of children affected by armed conflict. That is an area that cries out for more robust and sustainable funding. UNICEF remains especially concerned about the mental health, physical security and basic rights of children associated with armed groups. Tens of thousands of those children languish in camps, detention centres and orphanages in Syria, Iraq and other countries. They are shunned by their communities because of perceived or actual links with groups designated as terrorists.

When children leave those groups they should receive urgently needed protection and humanitarian assistance after the harrowing experiences they have endured — often for years. Instead, they are ostracized, rejected or locked up. Under resolution

2427 (2018) — a critical achievement of the Security Council last year — children associated with armed groups should be treated primarily as victims. That means all children, not just children under a specific age, including those who may have committed crimes. They should never be deprived of liberty solely because of their alleged or actual association with armed groups.

Boys and girls often join or support armed groups under extreme duress, coercion, fear or manipulation — or simply as a matter of survival. The evidence suggests that they are rarely driven by ideology. Rather than being detained they should be reintegrated into society, with a holistic approach to address their complex needs. Along with many others working on child protection, UNICEF has developed sustainable and evidence-based reintegration programmes to do just that. As Special Representative Gamba said, those programmes take time but carry great rewards.

UNICEF calls on all Member States to reintegrate children associated with armed groups into society and support holistic, evidence-based reintegration programming. We commend the States that are already doing so. Member States — indeed, all Governments and their militaries — are themselves accountable for preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. UNICEF continues to provide a strong voice on the issue. As we speak, UNICEF is supporting an age-verification workshop with the Sudanese military and Rapid Support Forces in Khartoum. Next week, our teams will conduct age verification with the Rapid Support Forces in Nyala, Darfur.

At the same time, we remain concerned about the excessive use of military force against civilians, including children, who engage in peaceful protest. Authorities should exercise maximum restraint in such situations. Otherwise, they risk killing children or causing grave injuries that lead to permanent disabilities. Protecting the lives and futures of children affected by armed conflict is not just the right thing to do; it is in our collective self-interest. In conflict and post-conflict situations worldwide, we must engage actively with young people to prevent spiralling violence and achieve lasting peace. They are the adults and the leaders of tomorrow. In the spirit of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, let us do better — let us do more — to protect vulnerable children. Our global future will depend upon it.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Fore for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Kamara.

**Ms. Kamara:** I wish to convey my special thanks to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations, the Government of Poland and the President of the Security Council for giving me this wonderful opportunity. I also thank the Secretary-General for his outstanding report on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509).

When the Revolutionary United Front began its attacks on the Liberian border in 1991, one of the bloodiest civil wars in the past 30 years was initiated. Sierra Leone became a part of that brutal, senseless and bloody war, which changed the lives of 95 per cent of Sierra Leone's people. Children became targets, used by lawless land leaders to fight against their will. Killing, rape and maiming were common. Following that bloody armed conflict, men, children and women were left with permanent trauma and stigmatization.

Today these children are seen as enemies, unwanted or unaccepted by their communities and even their own family members. The possibility of a brighter future for them is limited by the lack of proper resources, including education, counselling, vocational training and psychological assistance, which would equip them with the tools necessary to give them hope for a promising future.

Every once in while we come across the story of someone's life experiences, and we have to take a breath and reflect. This story is not the plot of a movie or a novel, the fruit of someone's imagination. This story is mine; it is about my life. I am honoured to make this statement before the Council and hope that it will inspire it to make a move in a positive direction.

My name is Mariatu Kamara. I was born and raised in a small village in the West African country of Sierra Leone. In 1999, when I was 11 years old and living through the 11-year civil war in my country, my life was changed forever. We lived in a brutal and lawless land, and one day the rebels attacked my village, captured my three cousins and myself and held us hostage for a day. During that time, I witnessed acts of great brutality: killing, maiming and the burning of houses. Yet my life was spared.

The rebels left me for dead in the dark of night, after they had used machetes to completely cut off both of my hands. A few hours later I found myself in the middle of dead bodies, bleeding profusely, scared

and very confused. I managed to make my way into the deep, dark forest, where I spent the night. The next morning, I met a man who helped to save my life. After all this savagery and brutality, I forged on, and with the help of strangers and my own strong will to survive, I made my way to the hospital in Freetown.

After my treatment, I left the hospital and spent a lot of time — years — begging for money, food and clothing while living in an amputee camp in Freetown. At the camp, I joined a theatre group along with many other young amputees that helped to raise awareness of our country's plight.

Through the kindness of a family from Canada, I was able to come to Canada. Moving to Canada was the step I needed to pursue a change in my life. It was in Canada that I was able to go to school and get an education for the first time in my life. I studied in the Assaulted Women's and Children's Counsellor/Advocate programme, in Toronto. Some years ago, I managed to transform my life story into a book called "The Bite of the Mango", with the help of my family, my friend Susan McClelland and Annick Press, the publisher.

I have been working for the protection of children in armed conflict. A few years ago, I was named a UNICEF Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. That assignment gave me the opportunity to reach out to those who have never had the chance to share their stories; to raise awareness; and to advocate for children affected by armed conflict. I do this by promoting their rights and raising awareness about their condition throughout the world, with the goal of ensuring that such atrocities will not be allowed to continue.

Serving as a UNICEF Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict is an honour for me. It gives me an opportunity and a platform to share my story and the stories of many, and to help educate the world about the impact of war on children throughout the world.

I first participated in this work when UNICEF took me back to Sierra Leone for the first time to visit and to see the wonderful work it has been doing there to promote the rights and welfare of children in Sierra Leone. I visited a centre where children affected by armed conflict are given the opportunity to share their stories as they go through the healing process. They write and publish their thoughts and views for their

communities so as to raise awareness of what they have been through. During my trip to Sierra Leone with UNICEF, I also visited schools and camps in rural areas and spoke to them about forgiveness and the importance of hope and faith and of finding the strength to move forward.

I have also been working for a while on my own project in Sierra Leone for women and children war amputees, providing counselling mainly for the girls, who have been traumatized and mentally affected and often feel forgotten.

Some final thoughts: all of us here have the right to do what we want to do. When you have children and families, you wish the best for them. We also wish the best for our friends and colleagues around the world who are affected by senseless wars.

We need the Security Council to stand up and do more. Yes, its members are doing something, but we need them to do more. As a UNICEF special representative, I believe in providing those people with the tools necessary for a better future through education. It is not just about reintegration, even if that is part of it. It is not just a question of releasing those kids from the war zone or from the bad people. They need life, they need futures — brighter futures. If we leave them outside on the street, what do we think we are creating? Clearly we are creating more conflict, because those kids are going to go right back to where they started. They do not have the proper training, tools or resources to go back to their communities and make positive changes for themselves.

We therefore need education, training and counselling. We need funding, especially for disabled people, including children. All forms of disability need to be addressed, but special focus is required for people who have been disabled owing to the impacts of war. In Sierra Leone, there are many cases, including mine. I am a good example, in fact. In some places, I do not have the right to do the things that I want because of disability. I have been subject to discrimination.

We need those things to stop. We cannot do it alone. Security Council members have the tools and the power to make those things stop, to make violence stop. I know that there are rules of war and the law of war. Who made those laws? The Council has to stand up and make those laws more effective.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Kamara for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Awan.

**Mr. Awan:** First of all, let me express my appreciation to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations for having invited me and facilitated my coming to New York for today's open debate. My thanks also go to War Child Holland, and my colleague with me now, Mr. Eamonn Hanson, for allowing me to take the floor at this important meeting.

The world today has become a global village, which is quite different from the way it was when I was a boy. My name is Majok Peter Awan, and I know exactly what it is like to live in a village. I was born in 1979, in a remote village called Pakeer, located in what is now the Jonglei state of South Sudan. At that time, we did not have any hospitals or schools or even infrastructure to connect us with the world outside the village. The world was unaware of our existence, much less the suffering we endured during the Sudanese civil war. And we had no idea what the rest of the world looked like.

Yet, since the time when I was a child, the Security Council has recognized the severe impacts of war and other forms of armed conflict on boys and girls, whose protection it has taken steps to improve. It has developed a unique monitoring and reporting mechanism to collect information on the grave violations of children's rights in conflict, and, over the past two decades, it has increased its attention to children involved in armed conflict. But despite improved information systems and stronger normative frameworks, children living in conflict zones continue to face many of the awful abuses and violations of their rights that my peers and I faced in the Sudan a long time ago.

As a child, I lived in a village where our community took care of its members, although with little. We still felt responsible for the well-being of our children, parents and grandparents. But our well-being was not defined by material things; it was about the love and tenderness we shared with each other in the hope that the children would grow up peacefully.

At the age of five, I was already herding cattle, goats and sheep in the hot sun of tropical Africa, together with other children of my age. I was one of those many smiling, innocent, playful children. Little did I know what was to follow. The civil war in the Sudan broke out and soon reached my village. I really had no clue why the adults were fighting. Unfortunately, I found out very soon.

When I was seven years old, the local rebel group fighting the Government in Khartoum took me from my home and made me undergo a six-month intensive military training. I was then assigned to local rebel commander to work as his bodyguard and perform such additional duties as cooking, fetching water, gathering firewood, spying and looting. It was an overwhelming and debilitating situation of do-or-die. My four friends and I would play under the shadow of fear, because it was illegal to play. With that high level of vulnerability, there was nothing I could do but follow orders.

There was no social media to share my experiences, no United Nations monitors to document my story and no child-protection actor to calm my fears. It was me, myself and I in a devastating situation. Nobody saw me. The world had no clue as to what was going on. I felt totally abandoned by it. The serious trauma caused will have a lasting impact on the rest of my life. Of that I am sure.

But you know what? I managed to escape and survived the brutal killings and massive abuses of the 1992-1994 period of confusion in the Sudan. At the age of 15, I managed to reach the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, which was managed at that time by Radda Barnen; it is now run by Save the Children International.

Much was accomplished thanks to the camp's capacities and the support I received. I remember that they urged us to go to the church, play with other children and not stay by ourselves. After two years of trauma, I was able to socialize with other children again. Not all children can recover like I did without assistance from the outside. Child-protection programming, including individualized psychosocial support, education and livelihood opportunities, is key in the recovery of children and their families affected by conflict.

With unconditional support from my maternal uncle and child-protection actors, I went to school and university and finally got a job with War Child Holland as a child-protection and psychosocial-support coordinator in South Sudan. I am now able to help other little Majok Peters in my own country, which has been torn by a series of wars. Every single day, when I am in contact with all those innocent children affected by conflict, I see myself. As a child-protection and psychosocial-support coordinator, administering psychosocial support, managing cases, tracing and reunifying families and helping children formally associated with armed groups, survivors of sexual

violence, children with disabilities, children who are separated from their parents and detained children is not a simple thing, but a commitment.

Naturally, carrying out those functions makes me sad and brings back many bad and sad memories. But I am also happy that the world today knows, at the very least, what child protection, mental health and psychosocial support are and what they do. Not enough has been done, which is a shame since there is no excuse or reason for not knowing the harsh situation of those children.

Yes, we can switch off our televisions when it shows children with war trauma, but one minute later we will see it on our daily Twitter news feed or in our Instagram stories or we will see bloody pictures of wounded children on the leading international news websites. It is here and now. We cannot deny it anymore like the world did when I was a child.

In 2018, almost 50 million children were in need of protection in humanitarian settings. Yet child protection has not been systematically prioritized during humanitarian responses. It remains underfunded, deprioritized and even too late when children's lives are at risk. During a crisis, children are among the most vulnerable. They are exposed to life-threatening risks, extreme violence, abuse, physical and sexual exploitation, abduction or military recruitment — voluntary or forceful. Child protection programmes are essential for preventing violence against children, facilitating family tracing and reunification and ensuring proper and timely referrals of children in need of health care, food, education and psychosocial support.

My appeal to the Security Council is to ensure that children affected by conflict get the full support they need to heal their physical and psychological wounds. Otherwise, their past will become their burden. We know that today about 420 million children are growing up in conflict-affected zones. One of five will require urgent psychosocial support. In South Sudan alone, 19,000 children are associated with armed groups or forces. Every year, at least \$200 million of humanitarian aid is needed to scale up basic mental health care packages to reach children and adolescents in conflict zones. Additional support is needed for comprehensive child protection, case management, including reintegration, and livelihood and education programmes in order to provide individualized, gender-

sensitive support to address affected children's needs. What can the Governments in this Chamber do?

First, I call on them to promote the right to mental health and psychological well-being in international forums and to integrate mental health in their national laws, policies and emergency plans. All Governments should commit to increase their mental health spending allocation to at least 5 per cent of their total health budget. That should be in addition to budget allocations within their relevant sectors.

Secondly, I urge them to invest in child protection systems and services at the national, regional, and international levels. That includes increased long-term funding for reintegration programmes for former child soldiers, like me, as well as support services for survivors of sexual violence, children with disabilities and others in need, family tracing and reunification for those separated from their parents or guardians and timely referrals for children in need of health care, food, education, shelter and psychosocial support.

Thirdly, I encourage them to ensure that United Nations peace operations and political missions have the necessary resources to advance the children and armed conflict agenda. Such funding should be structured as long-term funding, rather than bursts of short-cycle humanitarian funding. That will allow multi-year interventions, in line with the long-term impact of war on children and the necessary deep social transformation to address factors that predispose children to recruitment. Where missions are downsized or transitioning, we must make sure that United Nations country teams are equipped to carry out those functions.

And, lastly, I urge them to take action to address the ongoing violation of children's rights. That includes calling on all countries to endorse the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and putting pressure on them to end and prevent grave violations against children, as well as to prioritize justice for crimes against children. Only through those measures will we be able to contribute to improving the lives of our youngest citizens in our global villages.

For me personally, the main character of a good and nice village is social cohesion — the duty to watch after each other. This is true for the elderly, but also for our children — especially those who cannot stand

up for their own rights or grow up in conflict-affected zones. That is exactly how we lived in my village when I was that smiling 5-year-old boy — not driven by any material wants, but by love, tenderness and the hope for children to grow up peacefully.

We can no longer ignore the facts, we can no longer wait, and we cannot stand still. Please take responsibility as the adults of our global village and take care of our children in conflict-affected zones. The world is engulfed by wars and conflict in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the rest of the globe. Children are the victims of such wars. We must redouble our efforts and support our children for the betterment of our global village. We are all inhabitants of the same global village. It is therefore time to act accordingly, since no child should ever be part of war.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Awan for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland.

First, let me thank the Secretary-General for his latest annual report (S/2019/509). We particularly welcome the focus in this year's report on prevention and reintegration efforts. I also commend the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for their commitment and continued efforts to mainstream the issue of children in armed conflict as a priority on international agendas.

I would also like to thank Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, for her tireless and dedicated work. In addition, we highly appreciate the moving and inspirational testimonies of Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan.

For the first time in the Security Council, the intention to pay serious attention to the situation of children affected by armed conflict was voiced through a presidential statement (S/PRST/1998/18) during the Portuguese presidency in 1998. Since then, in the Chamber we have agreed on a number of legal and systemic improvements — to name but a few, resolution 1261 (1999), which placed the issue of children affected by conflict on the Security Council agenda; resolution 1612 (2005), which appointed the working group; and resolution 1882 (2009), which extended the list of triggers of the six grave violations against children by adding sexual violence against children to the nexus in the Secretary-General's annual reports.

Notwithstanding those efforts, we still struggle to provide the right protection and preventive measures for girls and boys caught in conflict settings as we face a severe reality of complex crises and new conflict dynamics. The number of verified cases is still striking and the full scale of violence, neglect and exploitation still remains unknown. In 2018, despite some positive developments on the ground, the report (S/2019/509) identifies more than 20 countries with verified cases of grave violations against children and an alarming increase in incidents involving State actors.

Children are among the first victims of war and violence. The Secretary-General's report shows that in conflicts around the world children are being maimed, abducted, attacked in schools and hospitals, recruited to fight, sexually abused and denied humanitarian aid. Such traumas deprive them of their childhood and dignity and leave permanent marks on their adult lives.

Most of the current conflicts originate from poor political and economic governance, violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, impunity, corruption, injustice and inequalities. We should start every single discussion by acknowledging the most obvious truth, namely, that addressing the root causes of conflicts, prevention and finding political solutions should come before anything else.

Conflict and post-conflict periods deprive children of one of their basic needs and rights — safety. Their protection and the prevention of grave violations are a fundamental priority within the United Nations mandate to safeguard civilians and put human rights at the centre of peace and security efforts. The issue of child protection should be taken into account in all phases of the conflict cycle: mediation, ceasefire, peacekeeping, peace talks and post-conflict situations.

Protecting children affected by armed conflict is a joint responsibility that requires a collective response to all forms of violence. Still, for the protection mandates to be more effectively executed by the United Nations, the bottom-up approach must be one of the principles. That should be achieved by extending and supporting the role of child protection advisers responsible for addressing child rights and protection issues at all stages of the peacebuilding process, as well as protection actors on the ground, including those based in the community. Last year, child protection actors were able to support the reintegration of more than 13,600 children.

The protection of vulnerable and fragile groups of children, namely, refugees, internally displaced persons and children with war trauma, remains one of the priorities of Polish development cooperation. Poland has been assisting the youngest victims of conflict in eastern Ukraine with psychological support and has been providing the most basic needs, shelter, rehabilitation and education in the Middle East.

In that context, we want to reiterate our strong support for the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF in drawing attention to the importance of reintegration programmes that benefit children formerly associated with armed groups. We are also very honoured to serve as a member of the steering committee of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, as well as a member of the Group of Friends of Reintegration of Child Soldiers. Poland strongly calls for full inclusiveness of the reintegration programmes and underlines the fundamental importance of the community-based approach, including the role of local and religious leaders in supporting the fight against the stigmatization of children previously associated with armed conflicts.

The scale of violation and suffering of children often remains unnoticed despite the heroic and persistent efforts of humanitarian, social and protection officers around the world. Earlier this year, the Office of the Special Representative launched the global advocacy campaign Act to Protect. Let us therefore reflect on ways that the Act to Protect advocacy campaign could further serve as a genuine and measurable tool in accelerating progress on the ground.

Resolution 1882 (2009) fed into the process of strengthening the zero-tolerance approach towards killing, maiming, rape and other violations of a sexual nature against children. We renewed our commitment to safeguarding children against sexual violence in the recent resolutions 2427 (2018) and 2467 (2019).

During an armed conflict, children with disabilities are more likely than others to experience violence. Also, the fundamental legal framework is in place and efforts to ensure the fulfilment of their rights have improved. Girls and boys with disabilities continue to remain among the most marginalized and exploited.

The further strengthening of the foundations for the protection of the most vulnerable groups is critical. Poland actively participated in the process through the

adoption of resolution 2475 (2019), on persons with disabilities, which stresses the specific needs of those with disabilities in armed conflict.

What I believe we all wish to achieve is to give children their childhood back and to stop the cycle of violence. We should act together in order to achieve that goal.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

**Mrs. Van Vlierberge** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to thank all the briefers for their valuable contributions. I would like to especially thank Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their moving and very courageous testimony and for today recalling today of what is at stake in this debate. It is not a question of talking or holding philosophical, unproductive and academic discussions. We are talking about real lives, people's lives and the lives of thousands and thousands of children who are victims of armed conflict.

This open debate marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), as a number of speakers have mentioned. While considerable progress has been made over the past decade, this year's annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) reflects a number of unprecedented serious violations against children since monitoring began. Belgium is deeply concerned by the particularly high number of child victims and calls on all parties to take measures to protect children in accordance with the principles of distinction and proportionality. The increase in protracted conflicts around the world, and long-lasting wars, causes greater indirect damage and affects more and more children. The shift of conflict to urban areas and the use of long-range explosive weapons in populated areas have devastating effects on boys and girls. Belgium is particularly alarmed by the use of the refusal of humanitarian aid as a weapon of war, preventing children from having access to life-saving assistance. At the same time, the data on the serious violations committed against children are considered underestimates due to lack of access, stigma and the fear of reprisal. Our work is therefore far from over.

In its capacity as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Belgium helped to build consensus on two sets of conclusions. One concerns serious violations of children's rights in Syria and the other in Myanmar. The unity of the Security Council on those two situations is an important signal.

Belgium supports the mandate and work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. As such, we mobilize all the instruments at our disposal. We have organized joint meetings with the sanctions committees focused on following up on the Working Group's previous conclusions and have organized videoconferences with field missions before the renewal of their mandates. Finally, we want to integrate the dimension of children and armed conflict in all the work of the Security Council. We propose that the Special Representative regularly address the Council on national situations, as has already been the case for Yemen and the Central African Republic. The United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism is essential to that mandate. The annual report of the Secretary-General, based on factual and verified information, is a fundamental tool for engaging in dialogue with the parties to conflicts and for achieving concrete commitments through, inter alia, national action plans. Such an approach is essential to maintaining the credibility and independence of the children and armed conflict mandate. That would be the best way to make real change for children affected by conflict.

The effective implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda is a responsibility that we all share. That implies the maintenance of a specialized child protection capacity within United Nations peacekeeping and political missions. It also means prioritizing child protection concerns. But let us not forget prevention. It is in the name of prevention that we must work for the long-term comprehensive reintegration of children, investing in programmes that provide individualized support that address protection, psychosocial support and education needs. Experience shows that children who have gone through such programmes become less vulnerable to re-recruitment by armed groups. Through reintegration, boys and girls have an opportunity to build a life away from conflict and to move towards the future without being haunted by the past. While prevention is obviously preferable, Belgium also recalls the need to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and other serious violations of international law and human rights law, including, where appropriate, through full cooperation with the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Belgium fully associates itself with the statements of the

European Union and the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict to be delivered later.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): As this is the first time that I am attending a formal meeting of the Security Council since I assumed my role as the Permanent Representative of China five days ago, please allow me to take this opportunity to extend my cordial greetings to you, Mr. President, and the colleagues present. I look forward to working with you, Sir, and every colleague in close communication, coordination and cooperation.

China thanks Peru for its productive work as President of the Council for the month of July and congratulates Poland on its assumption of the Council presidency for the month of August. We welcome Mr. Czaputowicz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, who is presiding over this meeting. We give special thanks to Ms. Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund; and the two other briefers for their statements, which were very moving.

Children are the hope of every country. Caring for children is protecting our future. In recent years the international community has made tremendous efforts to protect children affected by conflicts and achieved positive progress, but armed conflicts, far from being eliminated, have intensified. As was pointed out by Ms. Gamba in her statement, 12,000 children died or were maimed in 2018, setting a new record high. That record high serves as a sad reminder that we have a heavy and arduous responsibility to protect children from the scourge of war so that they can grow up in safety and security. China opposes and condemns violations of children's rights and interests in armed conflicts and supports the efforts of the United Nations and the Security Council to protect children in armed conflicts. I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, achieving peace provides the best protection for children. As children bear the brunt of war and conflicts, preventing, resolving and diffusing conflicts is a top priority. That is the fundamental way out. Being the primary organ for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council should fulfil its duties by using all political means, such as mediation, good offices, dialogue and negotiation, as is stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations, promote cooperation with regional and subregional

organizations and support and urge parties to a conflict to resolve disputes by peaceful means so as to create a safe environment for children to grow up.

Secondly, we should support the countries concerned as they take up their primary responsibilities. The key to implementing resolution 1882 (2009), on the protection of children affected by armed conflict, lies in the efforts and cooperation of the Governments concerned. The international community should fully respect the leadership of the countries concerned, enhance dialogue and communication and provide effective support and assistance in addressing difficulties, including financial and technical assistance. In the long run, sustainable development is the foundation underpinning lasting peace. The international community should respect and guarantee the rights of the countries concerned and their status as developing countries.

Thirdly, we should forge synergy in international efforts to tackle both the symptoms and the root causes of problems. In the collective endeavour of the international community to resolve conflicts, the protection of children should be treated as an integral part and given full attention in political negotiations and peace agreements. In advancing the post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding strategy, we should give priority to children's return to school and reintegration in society and enhancing child-protection mechanisms. Adequate financial resources should be provided and development assistance scaled up. The countries concerned should be actively supported in their efforts to eradicate poverty, promote education and protect children's rights. China is ready to work with all parties in that respect so that children in conflict areas can bid farewell to weapons, stay away from war, lead a happy life, with dignity, and create a bright future for themselves, their countries and the world, at large.

**Mr. Ipo** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire congratulates Poland on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and wishes it every success. We also congratulate the delegation of Peru for an excellent presidency in July.

My delegation welcomes the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, who is presiding over today's open debate on children and armed conflict. It demonstrates that your country, Mr President, is interested in solving the problem. We also cordially welcome Ambassador Zhang Jun, Permanent Representative of China.

My delegation congratulates Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, on her briefing on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509). We also commend Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF and Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan, civil society representatives, for their illuminating briefings.

In recent years, the issue of the protection of children in armed conflict has been a source of concern for the international community, in particular the Security Council, whose commitment to the subject is reflected through its adoption of resolution 2427 (2018). That resolution provides an adequate framework for protecting the rights of the child and promoting the well-being and empowerment of children throughout the conflict cycle as well as during peacebuilding. However, my delegation notes that, in spite of the relevant legal norms, as underscored in the report, the fate of children in armed conflict is increasingly worrisome.

In 2018, the United Nations documented and reported more than 24,000 violations of all kinds of which children were victims in 21 countries, as compared to 21,000 in 2017. In addition, according to the monitoring and reporting mechanism created by resolution 1612 (2005), the total number of children murdered or maimed rose to 12,038. Against that already grim backdrop, there is also a growing trend of using child soldiers to carry out suicide attacks or as human shields, as well as of destroying schools and health facilities, which deprives thousands of children of their right to education and health.

Côte d'Ivoire believes that cooperation among affected States, the United Nations and bilateral partners must be strengthened in order to prevent and combat violations of all kinds that undermine the well-being and development of many children. The Secretary-General's guidelines with respect to the commitment of the parties to conflict and the responsibility borne by Governments with regard to the protection of children affected by armed conflict, which align perfectly with the provisions of resolution 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), are, for my country, the relevant measures that enabled tangible progress to be made on the ground.

Today's debate provides my delegation with an opportunity to humbly recall that, Côte d'Ivoire, which was listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's reports on the plight of children in armed conflict from

2003 to 2006, during its sociopolitical crisis, provides a good example of implementing an action plan for the protection of children in armed conflict. As early as 2005, the Forces armées des forces nouvelles signed with the United Nations the first-ever action plan for the protection of children in armed conflict.

Thanks to the collaboration between the United Nations and partner non-governmental organizations, that action plan and those that followed allowed for the release of hundreds of children and for them to return to school and reintegrate into society. In addition, national efforts resulted in bringing together former child soldiers in a transit centre in order to facilitate their social reintegration through skills-training and schooling. Progress recorded in 2007 showed that Côte d'Ivoire was the first country to be removed from the annex to the Secretary-General's reports on the plight of children in armed conflict. That outcome demonstrates that excellent cooperation among affected States, the United Nations and international partners in implementing international norms and reintegration programmes remain indispensable to the protection of children in armed conflict.

Côte d'Ivoire encourages the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to continue her efforts with all parties with a view to integrating the protection of children into initiatives to resolve conflicts and build peace. We believe that achieving that goal requires adequate training in all components of security institutions. From 10 March 2004, the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire have included training on the protection of the rights of the child in the training manuals at military training schools, including for combat units, by employing decentralized focal points throughout the country. All of Côte d'Ivoire's military regions today have in place a unit for the protection of the rights of the child.

Côte d'Ivoire also believes that the protection of children in conflict must be accompanied by the strict application of the principle of accountability for armed organizations or groups that use child soldiers, encourage them to engage in violent extremism or reduce them to sexual slavery. We also underscore the essential role of civil society organizations in raising awareness and developing and implementing assistance programmes for affected States in transition.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates its support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General,

UNICEF and all relevant actors, and encourages them to continue their efforts to protect children in general, and, in particular, children who are the victims of abuse of all kinds in armed conflict.

**Ms. Norman-Chalet** (United States of America): We congratulate Poland on its assumption of the Security Council presidency for August and for holding today's annual open debate as the first signature event of its presidency. Your presence here today, Mr. President, underscores the urgent need to collectively address the issue of children and armed conflict around the world. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Peru for its presidency in facilitating a productive month of July.

We, too, would like to welcome Ambassador Zhang Jun to the Council.

We also thank Special Representative Gamba and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore for their briefings today. I would like to join other colleagues in thanking Mariatu Kamara and Majok Peter Awan for their incredible determination and moving testimonies today, which, as others have said, take us beyond the discussions and compel us to act in a meaningful way. I thank them very much for being here and sharing their stories. Their advocacy has helped focus the world's attention to children in armed conflict and reminds us of our responsibility as Member States to protect civilians from harm, especially children. We are proud of the work of our partners to better protect children affected by armed conflict all over the world. The United States strongly supports UNICEF in its mandate to protect and assist children all over the world, including specialized support for the survivors of violence and assured access for children to a range of life-saving assistance, including nutrition, health, water and sanitation.

Majok Peter Awan's testimony, as a former child soldier and now a United Nations child protection officer, is particularly inspiring for all of us here today. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) this year starkly makes clear, the number of children killed, kidnapped, maimed and used and abused is even more staggering today than it was when the Council began to collectively address children and armed conflict more than a decade ago. The United States remains fully committed to the critical work of the United Nations and the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in ending the impact of conflict

on children wherever possible to prevent their future involvement in war and to assist affected children in recovering from violent conflict. Our actions taken today to protect children from armed conflict will matter in the years ahead for future generations, as Ms. Kamara so eloquently said. Protecting children today means staving off future conflict and the radical radicalization to violence of scores of young people. We appreciate the particular focus on the needs of the disabled, making sure that they, too, are reintegrated.

The United States remains deeply concerned about continuing violations and abuse against children, particularly in Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, the Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Syria. The United States welcomes the great progress achieved by the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in recent days to adopt conclusions on Burma and Syria with the consensus of all 15 Council members. We commend Belgium's leadership as Chair of the Working Group and for facilitating these important discussions.

Moreover, the United States endorses the Working Group's conclusions reiterating that the regimes in both Damascus and Naypyitaw must immediately address the Council's calls to take steps to halt the recruitment and use of children. While we acknowledge that the Working Group has achieved progress with the adoption of its recent Burma and Syria conclusions, much more remains to be done.

The United States is committed to better integrating the children and armed conflict agenda when we discuss conflict situations in the Security Council. The United States will continue to address ways to strengthen the protection of children across all of the Security Council mandates.

We further welcome the signing by the Syrian Democratic Forces of an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in Syria. We also commend the efforts made by the Government of Yemen and the coalition to strengthen child-protection issues. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, efforts by United Nations child-protection specialists to work with the Government resulted in 14 armed-group commanders renouncing the recruitment of child soldiers, releasing all child soldiers from their ranks and allowing the United Nations to verify that commitment.

In the Central African Republic, the engagement of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated

Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic with armed groups on action plans to protect children appear to offer the same inroads for education and change. In both of these cases, the immediate goal is to protect children from violations and abuses in the context of armed conflict. By engaging with armed groups, building trust and offering alternatives to violence, United Nations actors on the ground are able to open up new possibilities for sustainable peace.

For our part, the United States continues to prioritize child-protection programming that is life-saving and essential for survival as well as longer-term recovery, resilience and healing. We will continue to invest in preventive and responsive programming to protect children from violence. We know that the resumption of familiar, safe and nurturing routines, particularly within a family, helps children heal, build resilience and better cope with stress. The United States calls on all countries to join our efforts and increase contributions, so as to do their part to help children in need of safety, food and other life-saving interventions.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to commend the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland on his commitment to the rights of children. I also thank Ms. Mariatu Kamara; Mr. Majok Peter Awan; and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, for their statements.

This year we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child and, in two days' time, the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), submitted at the initiative of France and adopted unanimously by the Council. This is an opportunity to take stock not only of the progress made, with more than 130,000 children freed in approximately 20 years, but also of the considerable challenges ahead. In 2018, there were 25,000 verified violations, including 12,000 killings and cases of maiming. This is an inadmissible record, and that is why the Council must step up its action in order to better protect the more than 200 million children who are confronted daily with a situation of war.

We commend the role of Belgium as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We must use all the tools available to us to protect children. First and foremost, we must make full use of the mechanisms created by the Council. Resolution 1882 (2009) in particular strengthened the monitoring

and reporting mechanism, which must remain at the heart of our strategy. I would like to commend the Special Representative on her recent visits to the Central African Republic and to Mali, which are vital in order to establish a dialogue with the authorities and with armed groups. Such visits are imperative. We are encouraged by the signing of additional plans of action by the Central African Patriotic Movement and the Syrian Democratic Forces, which we hope will lead to positive results.

Child-protection advisers also play a key role. We owe them, for instance, the successes obtained by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is vital that their functions and specific roles be maintained within peacekeeping operations. I welcome also the adoption by the Working Group of the conclusions on Syria and on Burma, which now must be fully implemented.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate the importance of the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509), which list the parties to armed conflict that commit violations against children. Their role as a deterrent and a motivating force needs no further demonstration. It must be made clear that no party will be struck from these annexes without first having demonstrated real progress. Resolution 1882 (2009) defines sexual violence as a criterion for the inscription of parties on the blacklist. However, we must acknowledge that 10 years later we have not put an end to such violence and must therefore redouble our efforts. The cooperation between the two Special Representatives on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for Children and Armed Conflict is vital. Their interaction with the sanctions committees and the exchange of information on individual cases must also be further bolstered.

We must also step up our efforts to prevent violations and reintegrate children who are victims of conflict. On 31 October 2017, the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, presided over an open debate in the Security Council (see S/PV.8082) and proposed measures based on prevention and the reintegration of children. Bearing this in mind, we call once again on those States that have not yet done so to adopt the constitutional bloc to protect children in conflict by signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol

to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and by endorsing the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or groups; the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles); the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers; and the Safe Schools Declaration.

This legal corpus must be fully implemented, which involves punishing and trying those responsible for grave crimes against children through the use of national, joint or international legal mechanisms. This involves also ensuring access by children to education, health care and other essential services in safe schools and hospitals. This is a priority of President Macron, who decided that France would contribute €200 million to the Global Compact on education and set up innovative financing by focusing as a priority on the education and empowerment of girls.

France is furthermore fully committed to the reintegration of children, not only as co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Reintegration of Child Soldiers, but also and especially on the ground, including in the Central African Republic, where France is funding several projects related to the access to education.

We will continue to play an active role in shielding children from the suffering of war. We often say that children represent the future and coming generations and that they are the condition of a lasting peace, but protecting them is also a universal moral obligation, and we must redouble our efforts.

**Mr. Ndong Mba** (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by congratulating Poland on having assumed for the second time the presidency of the Security Council, as well as by expressing our gratitude and appreciation to His Excellency Minister Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, for having convened this open debate on the extremely complex, important and timely topic of children and armed conflict. We are very pleased that he has travelled to New York to preside over this debate.

At this time, we would like to congratulate Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra on Peru's successful presidency of the Security Council during the month of July. We also welcome Ambassador Zhang Jun among us.

We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, as well as our guests, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan, for their important and informative briefings.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea is extremely concerned that a year ago the Security Council adopted its twelfth resolution on children and armed conflict (resolution 2427 (2018)), with the aim of addressing the widespread impact of armed conflict on children and the long-term consequences of this impact on peace, security and sustainable development (see S/PV.8305). Despite the fact that, since the publication of the historic Graça Machel report (A/51/306) in 1998, progress has been made in advancing the protection of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict, the statistical figures provided in the annual report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (S/2019/509), which covers the period from January to December 2018, illustrate great violations against children both in situations included in the agenda of the Council and in those that are not: recruitment, exploitation, killing, abduction, rape, mutilation and all forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of access to humanitarian aid. More than 24,000 grave violations against children in 20 countries have been documented. Even more seriously, the report indicates that the number of violations attributed to State actors and international forces is increasing, while those attributed to non-State actors have remained stable.

Today we have witnessed two moving stories told in the first person by two young people who have lived the horror and meaninglessness of war in their very own flesh. Their stories, however, are two stories of overcoming, of resilience and extraordinary fortitude. These stories should never have happened, but they did happen, and they are happening every day; while we are sitting here, they are happening. Right now, in South Sudan, in the Central African Republic, in Yemen, in Syria, in Libya, and many other places, thousands of children are still being recruited to fight adult wars. In the twenty-first century, they continue to be exploited, brutalized, raped, mutilated, mercilessly murdered. These barbaric acts remain ongoing.

Where is the progress that humankind claims to have achieved? Let us not fool ourselves. We are all fathers and mothers. As long as the children of some

may enjoy a full childhood and those of others have to lose their innocence fighting wars from the age of five, humankind has not made and will not make progress. I sincerely thank Mariatu and Majok Peter for their courageous testimony. Let us seriously consider adhering to the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in order to make a better village.

In conclusion, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea applauds the release and reintegration of 13,600 children, and expresses its support for efforts to protect children in armed conflict, thanking and congratulating UNICEF and non-governmental and civil society organizations that are sparing no effort in their noble work to protect children. In addition, we call on all States Members of the United Nations to continue to support the implementation of action plans and other commitments to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict.

**Mr. Schulz** (Germany): First of all, I would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, His Excellency Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, for convening this important debate.

Today some 420 million children worldwide are affected by conflict. We therefore face the real danger that the Security Council sits idly by as a whole generation of children grows up without knowing peace and without having access to basic services and education. We need to change that, and I would like to extend our utmost appreciation to Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for briefly showing us the way forward and reminding us of the brutal realities on the ground. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba for Children and Armed Conflict and Ms. Henrietta Fore for their outstanding and important work. Germany is proud to be one of the largest donors to UNICEF.

We take our commitment to children's rights seriously and see our engagement in the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict as an important part of that. I would like to thank Belgium for its excellent chairmanship of the Working Group. We are pleased that under Belgium's leadership the Group has been able to agree on strong conclusions on Syria and Myanmar this year and has developed more innovative ways of following up on its conclusions. Let me focus on three brief points.

First of all, on the United Nations framework for children in armed conflict, we welcome the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) and note the listings contained in the annexes. We are aware that this is not an easy exercise, but there is intrinsic value in the report and the listing. It will open further avenues for engagement by the United Nations. We would therefore encourage Special Representative Gamba to continue to work towards concluding and implementing action plans with the listed parties and further engage the countries mentioned in the narrative of the report.

In this vein, we also welcome Special Representative Gamba's recent travel to Mali and the Central African Republic, her recent public statements about situations of concern and her successful efforts to conclude an action plan with the Syrian Democratic Forces. We encourage her to dig even deeper into the issue of children deprived of liberty for alleged association with armed groups, for example in Nigeria and Iraq. We will specifically be providing funding to her Office to engage in more regional prevention programmes as per resolution 2427 (2018).

We also very much appreciate her cooperation with the European Union and with NATO, where we have supported the position of Senior Children and Armed Conflict Adviser. Since much of the work on children in armed conflict is entrusted to child-protection advisers in United Nations peacekeeping operations, Germany underlines the need United Nations missions to be given adequate resources in this regard, which is especially important since human rights and other protection functions have in some cases been consolidated, and thus the distinct role of child-protection adviser needs to be preserved.

Secondly, let me say a few words on the grave violations described in the report. We deeply regret, as many speakers before us have, that 10 years after the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), there seems to be no end in sight for the killing and maiming of children. In fact, we have been reminded of the fact that the numbers are unfortunately at a record high. The Secretary-General has identified Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen as cases of particular concern. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas needs to be avoided at all costs in that regard. In Syria alone, air strikes, barrel bombs and cluster munitions have killed and maimed over 1,850 children, which is both unacceptable and tragically unnecessary.

We also deeply concerned about sexual and gender-based violence, the levels of which are constantly underreported in the monitoring and reporting mechanisms, owing to the difficulty of verification. Despite the strict verification requirements, the Secretary-General was able to confirm appallingly high figures in some cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, for example. In April this year, the Security Council called for a more consistent focus on the gender-specific nature of sexual violence against all affected populations, including men and boys, and recognized the situation of children born out of sexual violence. We will keep our attention on these issues and we need to ensure non-discriminatory and multisectoral assistance to all child survivors of sexual violence. That also must include access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Finally, as initiators of resolution 1998 (2011), on attacks on schools and hospitals, we condemn all such attacks, which contravene international law, in the strongest terms. We have seen such attacks in Syria and Afghanistan. With 225 recorded attacks on schools and hospitals in Syria, the number for 2018 was at an all-time high since the beginning of the conflict. We urge all States to sign on to the Safe Schools Declaration.

Germany is working hard to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law so as to prevent all six grave violations documented by the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509). That is why, together with France, we are drawing up a humanitarian call for action to improve compliance with international law and humanitarian principles, to be presented in September. In that context, we particularly look forward to the upcoming debate about the Geneva Conventions, under the Polish presidency's initiative.

Lastly, I want to share a few words on accountability and integration. In our view, the most effective way to prevent grave violations is to ensure that there is accountability instead of impunity. Impunity regarding violations against children must be stopped. In Myanmar, for example, accountability for mass atrocities, including sexual violence, killings and maimings in Rakhine, is wanting.

Germany also reiterates its fullest confidence in the work of the International Criminal Court in ensuring accountability as well as that of international investigative mechanisms, such as those set up by the Human Rights Council. It is clear, however, that for

long-term reconciliation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict, we need community-based programmes anchored in a child-rights approach that complements accountability mechanisms. All too often, staying with armed groups appears to be a more viable option for children than being released into an environment with no basic services, no education and, crucially, no psychosocial support. That underlines the urgent need for more predictable long-term resources for integration, and we are encouraged by the work of UNICEF and the Special Representative in looking at reintegration more fundamentally. We hope to soon be able to examine concrete suggestions for improvement.

**Mr. Meza-Cuadra** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we congratulate Poland on assuming the presidency of the Council for the month of August. We also thank Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs for convening this important meeting on children and armed conflict, which is a priority for Peru. We also thank you, Sir, and other colleagues for their kind words on Peru's presidency for the month of July.

We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, Ms. Henrietta Fore of UNICEF, Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan for their briefings.

Peru is fully committed to the agenda of children and armed conflict. Children are one of the most vulnerable segments of the population due to their helplessness and dependence. In situations of armed conflict, humanitarian crises and forced displacement, that vulnerability increases exponentially, to the detriment of their right to grow and develop in an environment of sustainable peace. Special mention should be made of the situation of girls in such scenarios. Sexual exploitation, gender-based violence and trafficking in persons are illicit acts that increase their vulnerability and undermine their physical safety, empowerment and attainment of gender equality.

With regard to the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509), Peru is concerned about the serious violations of children's rights and brings them to the attention of State actors who, through their action or inaction, have contributed to the spread of those crimes. Peru condemns all forms of violence against children, including physical and psychological violence. It is incumbent on the Council and on the States Members of the United Nations to recommit to implementing

urgent and effective measures to halt and reverse this trend. It is undoubtedly a question of emphasizing not only preventive and rehabilitative measures, but also corrective measures that involve sanctions that serve as an example in order to ensure the well-being of children.

Peru endorses the Secretary-General's appeal to the actors involved to take all necessary actions to prevent the serious violations described in his report. In that regard, it highlights the need to establish synergies among the various United Nations agencies, Member States and civil society organizations, taking into consideration the most relevant international instruments that form part of the global institutional framework to address this problem.

In that regard, Peru highlights the contribution made by the Safe Schools Declaration, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which provide guidelines for protecting children against their recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups, allowing their release and achieving their effective social reintegration.

In that connection, Peru believes that the rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict is of paramount importance, as it not only restores their dignity and hope, but also empowers them as active promoters of peace. We therefore stress the importance of promoting psychological, educational and professional training programmes that will contribute their full rehabilitation and social inclusion.

Within the framework of peace operations, it is also indispensable to establish special and priority mechanisms for the protection of children in conflict, as well as to offer adequate training on this topic to troop-contributing countries.

In conclusion, I wish to offer Peru's full support for the work of the Special Representative and commend the priority that the Secretary-General attaches to this issue as a vital element of the establishment of sustainable peace. In the light of the complex situation that has been set out today and in the context of its firm commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Peru will continue to work constructively on behalf of children in armed conflict with a view to ensure their well-being and guarantee their exercises of their fundamental rights.

**Mrs. Cedano** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this important meeting and thank the briefers for their presentations. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the representative of UNICEF and the other relevant actors for their work, and reiterate the Dominican Republic's support for the agenda of children and armed conflict within the framework of the Council. The testimonies of Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan confirm the importance of the agenda and call on us to promote it through action.

We believe it is critical to increase the capacities of United Nations peacekeeping and political missions by granting them the resources and ability needed to protect children in conflict. That includes equipping them with child protection advisers, as well as prioritizing actions with the affected communities in order to promote early warning and protection mechanisms. We see the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as a valuable tool for maintaining open channels of communication with actors on the ground, as well as in country-specific approaches.

The Dominican Republic is concerned about the number of children whose lives are threatened by indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and infrastructure. Last year, in Afghanistan alone, the United Nations verified reports concerning 3,062 child victims, including 927 deaths and 2,135 cases of mutilation.

The psychological effects on a child victim of sexual violence have unimaginable consequences. We must therefore prioritize concrete measures to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict, as well as to identify those responsible and ensure that the perpetrators pay for their horrendous acts.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) highlights, for example, that in Yemen there were 275 incidents of denial of humanitarian access in 2018, including restrictions on movement, interference in the implementation of assistance, violence against humanitarian personnel and attacks on water facilities. Such events threaten the livelihoods of more than 7 million children in one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in history.

The report also highlights that in Somalia, by means of intimidation, a total of 2,228 boys and 72 girls were recruited and used by parties to the conflict. That

trend is repeated in many other contexts, not only in Africa but also in the Middle East, and is used as a way of perpetuating hatred and exclusion.

To break that cycle, we advocate for greater protection of children and for the subsequent reintegration of those recruited by armed groups. That requires greater investment in education, training, counselling and family reunification programmes. Children too often continue to be stigmatized and criminalized for acts that they were forced to commit.

All the aforementioned shows us that there is still a long way to go to eradicate the abuses and horrors faced by children in conflict that do so much harm to their lives, well-being and development. In that context, last February we endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

In conclusion, children's education is one of the main rights affected and is very often the last to be restored. In Syria, the hundreds of verified attacks on schools have forced more than 2 million children to interrupt their studies in order to save their lives. The Dominican Republic is a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration as an initiative to raise awareness of the reprehensible war practice of using school premises for military purposes, and we advocate the immediate and complete elimination of such a practice.

**Mr. Matjila** (South Africa): At the outset, I would like to thank Poland for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. The debate is timely, as it coincides with the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), which gave an additional emphasis to the children and armed conflict agenda regarding the violations of killing, maiming and sexual violence. We wish to congratulate Peru on its successful presidency in July.

I would also like to thank all the briefers for their insightful briefings and express my gratitude to Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for sharing with us their stories as they journeyed through the valley of death to freedom and its possibilities today.

It is concerning that a decade since the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), there are still thousands of boys and girls killed, maimed and abducted, who fall victim to sexual violence and who are denied access

to humanitarian assistance. Their basic rights to education and health are threatened and their schools and hospitals are closed or cease to function as a result of violent attacks, as witnessed in many parts of the world today.

We are deeply disturbed by the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509), which states that more than 24,000 grave violations against children were verified by the United Nations in 20 countries in 2018. Children represent an alarming percentage of the overall number of casualties of war as refugees, internally displaced persons, unaccompanied minors, trafficked persons or sexual slaves. Those are some of concerns to which we are witness.

South Africa welcomes the efforts of Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to sign action plans with the parties to armed conflict so as to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, as well as other grave violations. It is paramount that such action plans be concrete and their timebound measures be implemented.

We also commend Ms. Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, for the Fund's rapid response to urgently support children in emergencies and engagements with all parties to negotiate humanitarian access and build trust on all sides in order to serve children.

South Africa welcomes the release of 13,000 children from armed forces and armed groups. However, we remain concerned about the manner in which children are forced to take an active part in hostilities, including carrying out suicide bombings against civilians.

We call upon the armed groups to stop the recruitment and use of children in armed forces, as Mr. Awan justified this morning. We are aware that children, particularly girls, associated with such armed conflicts are vulnerable to sexual abuse, including sexual slavery. Resolution 2467 (2019) is instrumental, as it aims to prevent those grave violations and provide for the protection of girls from sexual violence during conflict.

The detention of children who are part of, or perceived to be associated with, parties to conflict is worrisome. It is important that such children be treated primarily as victims. States have an obligation to ensure that relevant programmes are put in place to ensure that

children are reintegrated into society after they have been released from armed groups. South Africa applauds the measures put in place by countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan to improve the protection of children and emphasizes that a greater focus needs to be placed on extensive child reintegration programmes, as was recommended by Ms. Kamara this morning. We therefore commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF for launching the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in September 2018 to encourage greater support for child reintegration.

We are aware that, in many situations, perpetrators of grave violations remain unidentified. Even in cases where programmes and mechanisms to advance accountability exist, they often fail to achieve tangible outcomes for children. Access to justice is imperative for the advancement of children's rights and for defending their legitimate interests. That is paramount to their psychological and psychosocial development in ensuring that they are able to grow and develop into adulthood free from fear and unintended irreversible consequences, such as those described in Peter Awan's testimony.

On 16 June 1976, thousands of black South African children took to the streets to protest about the inferior quality of education to which they were subjected and demanded the right to be taught in their native languages. A hundred of them were shot dead and in the weeks of protests that followed, more hundreds of children were killed and a thousand injured. To honour their courage and in memory of those killed, in 1991 the Organization of the African Unity established the Day of the African Child. The Day also draws attention to the lives of African children today. The Day of the African Child's objective is to remember those children as well as to inspire sober reflection and action towards addressing the plethora of challenges that children in Africa face daily.

Children are fundamental to the future of peaceful and prosperous societies in all corners of the world. It is imperative that we partner globally, regionally and nationally to combine our efforts to collectively strengthen institutions and services for children, including justice, education and health services.

In conclusion, addressing the root causes of conflict should be the primary objective to prevent violations

against children. My delegation wishes to emphasize the importance of providing the necessary support to such boys and girls so that they can thrive in their reintegration processes and have opportunities for a better and brighter future. We should all remember an African saying: any child is my child.

**Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to wish Poland every success during its Council presidency for the month of August. We would also like to commend Peru for its exceptional presidency during the month of July.

We would like to thank the briefers for the valuable briefings that they have given. Their interventions will undoubtedly enrich our discussion today.

I will focus my intervention on an important matter: the implementation of Security Council resolutions with a view to putting an end to violations perpetrated against children in armed conflict. I would also like to stress the importance of the role of the United Nations and regional organizations, as well as mechanisms and initiatives aimed at protecting the child.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) cites some positive developments, which we welcome, especially the success of Governments and the United Nations in releasing and rehabilitating over 13,000 children former child soldiers throughout the world. That notwithstanding, this year the Secretary-General's report portrays a horrific image of the continued escalation of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict the overall number of which has reached 24,000. There have been a record number of such violations since the monitoring and reporting mechanism was established, including the astronomical figures of killings and maiming and alarming cases of sexual violence against children. To put an end to these violations we must first work to guarantee the implementation of Security Council resolutions, including those pertaining to children in armed conflict and to the protection of civilians, the most recent of which is resolution 2475 (2019) on persons with disabilities in times of conflict.

The Security Council has succeeded in putting in place a strong normative framework on the protection of children, starting with resolution 1261 (1999); followed by resolution 1882 (2009), which was adopted 10 years ago; and arriving at resolution 2427 (2018), which was adopted last year. Those resolutions do not just guarantee the protection of children from grave

violations; they also recognize the need to guarantee free access of humanitarian aid to children affected by conflict.

Putting an end to conflict and achieving lasting peace is the only sure way to end these violations. More than 20,000 children have fallen victim to the Syrian crisis that began in 2011. Here, I recall the unarmed Palestinian children who are suffering because of Israeli violations. Israel, the occupying authority, has been perpetrating violations against Palestinian children for many decades. I should also mention the innocent children of Yemen who are being recruited, abused and killed due to non-compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, conventions and international law, and to the attack perpetrated by the Houthi rebels.

My delegation also stresses the importance of augmenting resources and capacities to protect children and reintegrate them within society. Countries and Governments have the primary responsibility to protect their citizens, including the most vulnerable, such as children in general and children with disabilities in particular. Kuwait supports the vital role played by the United Nations in that regard. We also express our appreciation for the outreach conducted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict with national Governments with a view to drawing up action plans to protect children, in addition to the outreach she carries out with the various parties to conflict to put an end to violations. I reaffirm the need to provide the necessary technical and human resources to enable peacekeeping operations to implement their mandates and protect children in conflicts, including by deploying child protection advisers to United Nations peacekeeping missions, as needed.

Finally, we reiterate Kuwait's commitment to upholding the rights of children, especially children in armed conflict. We support all initiatives that would enhance compliance with the Charter of the United Nations and the achievement of international peace and security. We have taken upon ourselves the task of saving future generations from the scourge of war, and we have granted the Security Council special privileges in order to achieve this noble goal. Therefore, we as Member States must uphold that responsibility. We must take it upon ourselves to implement Security Council resolutions in order to achieve the purpose for which the Council was formed.

Today is the anniversary of the despicable Iraqi invasion of the State of Kuwait, which killed many of Kuwait's sons and daughters. With the grace of Allah Almighty and because of the Security Council's commitment to the implementation of its resolutions, the first of which was resolution 660 (1990), which was adopted on this day in 1990, my country was liberated with the support of sisterly and friendly countries, at the forefront of which were the countries of the allied coalition armed forces, which took the side of justice, righteousness and international legitimacy. I renew our thanks and appreciation from this very Chamber, the image of which is carved into the consciousness of every Kuwaiti citizen.

**Ms. Pierce** (United Kingdom): I too would like to express our thanks to His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland for being here today to conduct this debate. I join others in thanking all our briefers, particularly Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan, for sharing their very compelling testimonies with the Security Council this morning.

I want to add my voice to those congratulating Peru on a very successful presidency. I also welcome Poland's assumption of the presidency and pledge the support of the United Kingdom. I welcome our Chinese colleague, whom we had the pleasure of seeing earlier, and I wish to thank the Kuwaiti representative for drawing our attention to that very important anniversary.

What we have heard today shows that everybody has been deeply moved by the bleak picture of the impact of armed conflict on children that is conveyed in the report of the Secretary-General for the year 2018 (S/2019/509). I will not repeat many of the very pertinent points that have been made around the table. It is very clear that the issue of children in armed conflict is something that unites the Council. I suspect that it unites the whole membership. We ought to hold on to that as we try to find a way to enhance all the measures we have taken. If I may, I will use this meeting to focus on six ideas for further action to reverse some of the incredibly worrying trends of 2018.

First, and at the heart of all the violations against children set out in the report, is the widespread disregard we are seeing for international law, not just by non-State armed groups but also by Governments. We all know the situation in Syria, in particular in Idlib. We need to have an urgent conversation about the international legal framework, how to strengthen adherence to

international humanitarian law, and accountability for those who disregard it. In that connection, it is very welcome that the Polish presidency will also be conducting a debate on international humanitarian law and another very important anniversary.

Secondly, levels of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in conflict remain prevalent and too high. In Somalia for example, sexual violence was committed against hundreds of girls and boys by State and non-State actors alike. In South Sudan, sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon of war in concert with abductions, although we welcome the willingness of the Government to engage with the United Nations to develop a comprehensive action plan on all six violations there.

In November, the United Kingdom will have the pleasure of hosting the Global Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Conference will focus on addressing the root causes of sexual violence, tackling stigma, strengthening justice for survivors and holding perpetrators to account. We also hope that it will be able to launch a code ensuring that signatories uphold international standards and best practice when dealing with sexual violence. I hope many of the countries represented in the Chamber and our colleagues from the United Nations will be able to join us at that event.

Thirdly, and as was very clear from the testimony of Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan, we need to improve approaches to re-integrating children who have been recruited and used by parties to conflict. In situations such as that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where more than 2,000 children were separated from the parties to conflict in 2018, we need to increase funding for reintegration programmes. It also means that we need to improve the availability of psychosocial and mental health support, education, vocational training, jobs and support to the community. That came over really clearly from both of our civil society briefers today. For our part, we look forward to the outcomes of the studies commissioned by the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, of which we are a member and financial supporter.

Fourthly, we should strengthen our response to the denial of humanitarian access. The Secretary-General's report states that the number of incidents of denial of access decreased in 2018. It tells us little, however, about the extent of the impact on children. In Yemen, for example, the impact was clearly devastating and

in Myanmar, the United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the lack of humanitarian access. I take this opportunity to call on the authorities in Myanmar to honour fully the memorandum of understanding signed with the United Nations in June. As a first stage, we would hope that children and armed conflict reporting might be able to provide more information on impact in that regard. Looking forward, we should look further at how we make the denial of humanitarian access a trigger for listing in the annual report.

Fifthly, Member States should do more to embed child-protection mechanisms into their domestic systems. I was very interested in what Mr. Awan and the Executive Director had to say about that, in particular. We urge Member States to join us in signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and in endorsing initiatives, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments and the Vancouver Principles.

We ourselves have provided an extra £2.3 billion—in other words, more than \$3 billion for mental health care support, which includes extra funding for children. In June this year, we were able to launch a child's mental health prevention plan. In our royal family, Princes Harry and William have launched a mental health line called Shout. We take very seriously that aspect of the problem.

Sixthly, we should remain vigilant in our monitoring of ongoing conflict situations where there have been unlawful attacks on education, including in the Anglophone region of Cameroon and in eastern Ukraine.

Finally, I would like to express our admiration and respect for the United Nations own work; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General; the monitoring and reporting personnel and the child protection staff and their partners on the ground for the tireless work they do at great personal risk to themselves, and as we heard today, in very harrowing circumstances. They deserve our full support.

I would like to end by recalling what the Executive Director said about looking after the children as they are an investment in our global future. I do not think there can be a truer word than that.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would ask you, Madam President, to convey

our gratitude to Minister Czaputowicz for attending our meeting today. I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting on such an important topic.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new Chinese colleague, Ambassador Zhang Jun, who is taking part for the first time in a meeting of the Security Council and in an open debate.

We thank Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for participating in today's debate and for sharing her views on the protection of children in various countries. We thank UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore for her briefing. We listened with great interest to Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan. Their remarks were deeply disturbing. Such acts should not be occurring in today's world.

The Russian Federation expresses its concern about the plight of children in many parts of the world that are engulfed in armed conflict. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) clearly illustrates that fact. Based on the report, the most worrisome situations can be seen in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and several other countries.

The Security Council takes consistent measures to protect children and prevent acts of violence against them. In accordance with resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent documents, greater attention should be paid to the six categories of the most serious violations against children, within the framework of both the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Such violations include the recruitment and use of children as combatants, killing and maiming, abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. We should strive to counter those violations in the course of our work. In that regard, we believe that attempts to dilute the mandate of the Security Council in that area, by forcing it to consider other issues related to rights of children in a context outside the maintenance of international peace and security, are a step in the wrong direction. Such issues are part of mandates of other United Nations entities, whose work the Security Council should not duplicate. Only by adhering to the principle of the division of labour will we be most effective in solving all issues pertaining to the plight of children.

Preventing crimes against children is an important aspect of the package of measures on conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. We highly appreciate and support the efforts aimed at reintegrating children liberated from armed groups. We highlight the fact that the majority of States affected by armed conflict do a great deal to improve the plight of children. They often need international assistance. However, national Governments should play the primary role in protecting children in armed conflict. The role of the United Nations is first and foremost to complement and support those efforts. In that regard, we believe that Security Council mechanisms can be efficient only when they cooperate constructively with the country affected by armed conflict. In addition, resolution 1612 (2005) outlines the role of national Governments in interaction between the United Nations and armed groups with regard to children. Underestimating that requirement could lead to regrettable results as the leaders of armed groups may attempt to use their contact with United Nations agencies to make themselves appear legitimate in the eyes of the global community rather than to protect children.

The Russian Federation strongly condemns the violations of the provisions of international law, international humanitarian law, human rights and rights of refugees as they pertain to children. Indiscriminate attacks, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, the use of civilians, children, schools and hospitals as shields by terrorists and other violations of international humanitarian law are unacceptable. All those responsible for such crimes must be duly prosecuted and held accountable. International humanitarian law comprises a broad set of norms aimed at protecting children and civilian infrastructure during armed conflict. The efforts of the international community should be focused on adhering to those norms. The primary responsibility in that area lies with States.

We note with regret attempts to use children propaganda tools by involving them in plots and staged videos of all kinds. Apart from being extremely immoral, such actions undermine the efforts of the international community to protect children in armed conflict. In recent years, there have been increased calls to join various declarations, guidelines or principles that have been developed outside the framework of the United Nations and that address separate humanitarian aspects. We believe that the participation of States in these documents is a matter of their good will. However,

we would like to emphasize that such declarations, guidelines and principles cannot substitute for, amend or elaborate upon universally recognized norms of international humanitarian law.

Russia supports the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Her active and unwavering stance on the protection of children and her efforts to maintain a constructive dialogue with the States concerned make possible the achievement of notable progress. We also commend her impartial and objective approach in identifying and gathering reliable information on violations against children, as reflected in the report of the Secretary-General. We always carefully examine this information and take account of it in our work.

We call upon all members of the Security Council to continue to constructively cooperate with a view to effectively protecting children from the consequences of armed conflict.

**Mr. Syihab** (Indonesia): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to wish you and your team every success in presiding over the Security Council during the month of August. Rest assured that you can count on Indonesia's full support. Your presence here and your leadership of today's open debate demonstrates Poland's strong commitment to child protection in armed conflict.

I wish also to congratulate the Peruvian delegation on its successful presidency during the month of July.

We thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba, Executive Director Henrietta Fore, Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Peter Awan for their very comprehensive and eye-opening presentations.

Child protection has been an integral part of Indonesia's policy and sets the tone for our stance in condemning the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. On that note, we are deeply concerned by the scale and severity of violations in 2018, notably the record high number of casualties as a result of killing and maiming, the continued fighting between parties and new conflict dynamics.

Allow me to elaborate on three pertinent points.

First and foremost, I stress the importance of reintegration efforts for all children formerly associated with armed groups so as to allow them to be reunited with their families or caregivers and go back to their normal lives; the intensification of efforts by the

Security Council to address the root causes of conflict and prevent former child soldiers from being recruited again; and the fight against impunity for armed groups that unlawfully use children for military purposes. At this point, the reintegration process should be seen through the lens of conflict prevention.

Children associated with armed groups are usually stigmatized as immoral and dangerous, and this leads to my second point: that we should invest in extra efforts to engage such children who are facing social ostracism and help them find a constructive role in society. Mental-health and psychosocial supports that involve the local community are essential for an effective reintegration programme, including in ensuring access to quality education.

In this regard, we commend UNICEF, the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the relevant non-governmental organizations and personnel on the ground for their significant contribution to facilitating the transition of former child soldiers to a normal life.

Thirdly, we deem vital strategic partnerships between national authorities and personnel on the ground — peacekeepers and humanitarian workers — to multiply child-protection efforts. Such partnerships are of crucial importance to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Any shrinking of such assistance would translate into widespread insecurity. We therefore emphasize the merit of enhancing tailored and context-specific peacekeeping approaches, including through pre-deployment training on child protection.

For peacekeepers, child-protection capacity is crucial to conducting dialogue on action plans, the release and reintegration of children and the strengthening of monitoring mechanisms.

In practice, the child-rights-based approach should be pursued without sacrificing the safety and security of personnel on the ground, taking into account possible asymmetrical threats in connection with child soldiers.

The best interests of children must be given primary consideration in all actions without exception. Children have the right to be protected from violence wherever they live, especially those in situations of armed conflict. Our approach should be clear and constructive: to find the best, tailor-made solution to

prevent and end grave violations against children in each conflict situation.

Let us translate our words into action for the best interests of our children. They are our future.

**The President:** I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a very large number of speakers.

**Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I wish at the outset to personally congratulate your friendly delegation on your presidency of the Security Council for the month of August; you can rest assured of my delegation's support. I wish also to congratulate the delegation of Peru on its very successful stewardship during the month of July.

I wish to thank you, Mr. Minister, and your country, Poland, for having organized this very important debate on the topic of children during this year of historic commemorations, including the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009) and the establishment of the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These are deeply symbolic milestones that demand reflection and especially a response in terms of ways and means leading to an optimal international mobilization to protect children, prevent them from being recruited or sent into combat, and ensure that their basic rights are no longer violated in time of conflict.

Today's debate will no doubt contribute to raising international awareness and to strengthening our determination to act for a better world for all children, so that no child is left behind.

I would like to thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; and Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their very highly appreciated briefings.

In today's conflicts children are, unfortunately, the primary victims: when they are directly impacted, when they are separated from their loved ones, when their education is jeopardized, when they are taken out of school or living in the street, when they are forced to join armed groups and when they become the victims of exploitation and sexual abuses. Children who are victims of armed conflict have their childhood stolen from them and often suffer a vicious circle of endless violence. Likewise, children who were abducted and later released underwent terrible experiences during their detention that are traumatizing to their psychological makeup, and they are later stigmatized by society. All such children need our support as a priority in order to fully integrate into society.

The efforts of the international community would benefit from being incorporated into a more realistic and strategic approach, with respect not only to conflicts that are under way but also to an emphasis on prevention. At the same time, an approach that combines incentives as well as more binding measures, especially in terms of accountability and fighting impunity, is necessary.

The prevention of conflicts and their devastating effects on children requires that national and international efforts be coordinated, especially through, *inter alia*, the entrenchment of democracy, good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the promotion of sustainable development, as well as raising awareness of communities on the importance of protecting and promoting children's rights through use of the media, including television, radio, social networks, advertising campaigns and schools.

The establishment of legal, policy and institutional measures for the protection of children and the prevention and elimination of violence against them, including in times of conflict, remains a particular focus and should be guaranteed for those most at risk of being recruited by armed groups, in particular children separated from their families or without families, children placed in institutions, children living or working in the street, and refugee and migrant children. In addition, it is necessary to coordinate our actions and chart the path we must follow together — States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of civil society — to guide our initiatives and actions on the ground. Much has been accomplished but more remains to be done.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco condemns in the strongest terms all forms of violence against children in armed conflict, including their abduction and conscription by armed groups, their use as human shields, their being taken as hostages or their recruitment in refugee camps. Morocco's focus on children's rights at the international level was reflected in its 2019 presidency of the UNICEF Executive Board. I take this opportunity to reiterate to Ms. Fore and UNICEF, our confidence and great appreciation for their remarkable work and dedication in promoting the well-being of all children in all its dimensions.

In addition, Morocco has always been involved in international efforts to end the involvement of children in armed conflict. It has acceded to all international instruments relating to the rights of the child and was among the first countries to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments on this issue.

As part of the extension of these commitments to the protection of the rights of the child, wherever they may be, I would like to announce today that the Kingdom of Morocco has decided to endorse and join the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

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

**Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*):** At the outset, I should like to thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over today's meeting, and to congratulate Poland on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish the Polish delegation every success and I thank you for holding his open debate on children and armed conflict.

I like also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for the extensive efforts she and her Office are making to protect children in conflict zones. These efforts are of great importance to the Yemeni Government, as the recruitment or use of children as soldiers is one of the six grave violations prohibited by Yemeni legislation, in accordance with the Yemeni Child Law and international conventions. We also welcome the Executive Director of UNICEF.

The Houthi militias have recruited more than 30,000 children and are using them in the conflict. These

children have therefore become susceptible to violations, including killing, maiming and sexual violence, and are denied humanitarian aid, which has claimed the lives of more than 3,279 children, constituting an egregious violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law as well as all protocols and conventions on the protection of the children. The Houthi's rebellious militias have destroyed the lives of more than 4 million Yemeni children, forcing them to look for work owing to the deteriorated economic and humanitarian conditions caused by the war being waged there. The militias have drawn them to the battlefield, tempting them with money to sustain their families and ultimately shoving them into the pits of death.

These processes of recruitment have included children in schools, orphanages and juvenile institutions in local communities, while more than 1.6 million children have been denied education in the past two years alone. They have also embarked on shelling, demolishing 2,372 schools in part or in whole. They have used more than 1,600 schools as prisons and military bunkers, which has jeopardized the lives of these children. The children of Yemen living in the areas controlled by these militias are brainwashed and indoctrinated through the teaching of a warped curriculum filled with notions that glorify violence, sectarianism and incitement in a way that will have a very long-term impact. It will indeed be very dangerous for the future generations of Yemen if these extreme ideologies are not eradicated and eliminated.

The Yemeni Government reiterates its commitment to protecting children and shielding them from armed conflict. In fact, that has always been the commitment of the Government. The commitment manifests itself in a number of actions taken by the Yemeni Government. Given that we are short on time, I will not single out all these actions, but we will inform the Council about them in writing.

The armed Houthi militias have established summer camps to attract children into their ranks, which is an extension of their approach to exploiting Yemeni children, in violation of all international laws and norms. We look forward to accelerating the implementation of the updated plan of action and road map, which were signed in 2014. We also look forward to the visit to Yemen of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Gamba, to gain a first-hand overview of what is happening on the ground and direct experience

of the efforts being made by Yemen, especially in terms of the efforts made by the centre for the rehabilitation of child soldiers in Marib to reintegrate children. We call on international organizations to establish similar institutions for the reintegration of children.

We welcome the fact that the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509) takes note of the progress and commitments made by the Yemeni Government in favour of the protection of children. We welcome the cooperation and the serious work of Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We cannot overestimate the importance of a protective approach towards children, with due consideration for our remarks on the report and the significance of changing the monitoring mechanisms that rely on the parties or teams in Sana'a and accelerating the implementation of agreed plans and programmes.

In conclusion, the conflict in Yemen will be resolved only when its root causes are duly addressed and a sustainable peace is achieved, thereby ending the suffering of the Yemeni people. Peace should be based on the agreed terms of reference, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, the relevant Security Council resolutions — in particular resolution 2216 (2015) — and the reinstatement of the hijacked State institutions.

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

**Ms. Skåre (Norway):** I am speaking today on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

We are concerned about the continued increase in verified violations and abuses against children. This trend can and must be reversed. First and foremost, parties to conflict must respect international humanitarian law and human rights law. Protecting children and upholding their rights is not only positive for the individuals involved and their communities; it also contributes to successful reconciliation, reintegration and development. It is therefore closely linked to broader conflict-prevention efforts and the sustaining peace agenda.

We should give special priority to education in emergencies, especially the education of girls. The Safe

Schools Declaration, which was launched in Oslo in 2015, has been endorsed by 95 States so far. It is the key initiative in this context. The main objective is to prevent the military use of schools and stop attacks on schools during armed conflicts. We are encouraged by the positive response to the Declaration and the joint efforts to implement it.

The continued silence and stigma related to sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse is of particular concern. The international conference in May held in Oslo, entitled Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crises, sent a strong message that strengthening the prevention of, and response to, sexual and gender-based violence is a humanitarian priority. It gave visibility and recognition to the key role of national and local organizations, including local women's organizations.

Children involved in armed conflict not only need protection and comprehensive support and care, but also justice. In that regard, we want to recognize the crucial work of Justice Rapid Response in strengthening accountability for international crimes and human rights violations against children through the provision of highly specialized child-focused expertise.

Last year's unanimous adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) set out a framework for the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups. Successful reintegration is in the best interest of the child, but also in the best interest of societies. The human rights of children formerly associated with armed groups or violent groups must be fully respected, in line with international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Resolution 2427 (2018) also stresses accountability for all violations and abuses against children, not only the gravest crimes. In the process, the Council set a new standard for the prevention of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Resolution 2427 (2018) must now be translated into reality.

We reiterate our strong support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Ms. Gamba plays an essential role at the global, regional and national levels by advocating for children's protection and rights and providing practical guidance.

In conclusion, the Nordic countries urge all States Members of the United Nations to ensure that children

in armed conflict get the attention and protection to which they are entitled.

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

**Mr. Sparber** (Liechtenstein): One fifth of all children today live in conflict zones, and a record number of children were killed or maimed in conflict last year. United Nations reports and today's briefings are alarming. Thousands of children have been killed or maimed in Syria, many as a result of indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks in populated areas. Others became victims of unlawful siege tactics or of chemical weapons, which have been internationally prohibited for a long time. There is an urgent need for accountability for the atrocity crimes committed in the Syrian conflict. Liechtenstein applauds the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria for its important work in that respect. The progress achieved in the collection of evidence and the building of case files constitutes an essential step towards justice for all victims of the conflict, particularly the children.

In Yemen, almost 12,000 United Nations-verified grave violations were committed against children between 2013 and 2018, pointing to much higher actual figures. Killing and maiming as a result of air strikes remains the most prevalent violation, but child recruitment and attacks on humanitarian facilities, schools and hospitals also prevail. The Council has the responsibility to stop those violations and enforce compliance with its own resolutions and respect for international humanitarian law. In addition, Liechtenstein sees great value in political commitments by States, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, to improve children's lives during armed conflict.

Liechtenstein remains deeply concerned about the high occurrence of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including trafficking for sexual enslavement. Such violence is often underreported owing to the fear and stigmatization associated with it, in particular if perpetrated against boys. A culture of silence continues to impede accountability and justice and contributes to further cycles of violence and persistent harmful gender stereotypes. Liechtenstein welcomes the important work of non-governmental organizations in that regard. We support the work of Justice Rapid Response and its child rights experts, who have investigated grave violations against children in Myanmar, the Central

African Republic and Syria, among other places. The Liechtenstein-based non-governmental organization All Survivors Project conducts research and advocacy to improve global responses for every victim and survivor of sexual violence, including men and boys, in situations of armed conflict and forced displacement.

International criminal justice mechanisms, in particular the International Criminal Court (ICC), have done groundbreaking work to address grave violations against children. The ICC case against Dominic Ongwen illustrates the possible complexity of such violations. Indicted for war crimes, Ongwen began on his path as a child soldier himself, kidnapped and forced into military service at a young age. The judgment in the case of Bosco Ntaganda, released in July, represents another milestone in international criminal justice. The Court held the crimes against male child soldiers to the same standards as female child soldiers. And it was explicit in determining that the acts committed against male child soldiers amounted to rape and needed to be addressed accordingly. That provides a new basis to address sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, for the Council and other stakeholders.

Liechtenstein reiterates its strong support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and thanks her for her briefing today. Protecting the independence and integrity of her mandate is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility. An essential feature of the mandate has been its impartiality and reliance on evidence, which have led to concrete improvements by State and non-State actors in their protection of children. The strong support of States for the Special Representative is also a call for the Security Council to do more to preserve the key tenets of her mandate. In addition, more effective monitoring, documenting, investigating and reporting of violations against children by all relevant United Nations entities would help broaden the mandate's reach and depth, which we would greatly welcome.

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

**Mr. Arbeiter** (Canada): Allow me to start by congratulating Poland on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and to thank the Foreign Minister for his personal participation in this open debate.

*(spoke in Spanish)*

I would also like to commend and congratulate Peru for its successful work during the month of July.

*(spoke in English)*

I have two statements to deliver. I am pleased to speak first on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, an informal network of 42 interested Member States, representing all five regional groups at the United Nations.

We wish to thank today's briefers, in particular Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan, for their compelling personal testimony.

The Group is appalled by the scope and scale of grave violations committed against children, as documented in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509). On the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), we are particularly concerned about the large increase in cases of killing and maiming of children. We urge all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, and to put in place concrete effective protection measures for children in armed conflict.

In that regard, we welcome the recent signing of action plans and Special Representative Gamba's direct engagement with parties to armed conflict to end grave violations. However, action plans are only means to an end, not ends in themselves. Without their effective and timely implementation, such plans will not address the suffering of children in armed conflict. Accordingly, the mere signing of an action plan should not form the basis for delisting in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. We therefore commend efforts by the United Nations and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to follow up on action plans and to encourage their implementation.

The Group welcomes the recent release of more than 13,600 children from armed forces and armed groups and the work of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers. We stress the importance of long-term, comprehensive and community-based rehabilitation and reintegration efforts to provide assistance to children and prevent re-recruitment, including in areas formerly controlled by Da'esh. Children formerly associated with such groups should be treated as victims first, consistent with resolution 2427 (2018). The detention of children

in armed conflict should be used only as a last resort and for the shortest period necessary and should be in full respect of international humanitarian law and applicable international human rights law. Failure to do so will only sow the seeds of future conflict.

The Group is firmly convinced that the protection of children affected by armed conflicts must be at the heart of the prevention, development and sustaining peace agendas. We further welcome the launch of the ACT to Protect campaign to catalyse global attention and efforts to prevent and end the six grave violations against children. Indeed, there are several practical protection tools available to Member States, notably the Safe Schools Declaration, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Paris Commitments and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. We call upon Member States to further strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, including through ratification of the first Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as consideration of the endorsement of those commitments.

The Group highlights the contribution of regional and subregional organizations, as recognized in resolution 2427 (2018), in preventing grave violations by reinforcing the normative framework, exchanging best practices, mobilizing resources, coordinating humanitarian assistance, applying pressure on parties to armed conflict and addressing the transnational dimensions of child recruitment. Regional groups of friends of children in armed conflict can also play a helpful role in that regard, and we welcome the recent establishment of such a group in Mali.

We also welcome other measures adopted by the Security Council this year that contribute to the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. Those include resolution 2467 (2019) — introduced by Germany — which seeks to take a victim-centred approach to sexual violence in conflict and children born of wartime rape; resolution 2474 (2019) — introduced by Kuwait — which addresses children missing as a result of armed conflict; and resolution 2475 (2019) — introduced by Poland, with the support of the United Kingdom — which stresses the specific needs of children with disabilities in armed conflict.

The Security Council should continue to uphold child protection through the deployment of child

protection advisers to peacekeeping operations. However, adequate resources are also needed to deliver mission success. Therefore, cuts to the staffing and budgets of child protection adviser positions as well as consolidation efforts that would undermine the United Nations ability to deliver on the critical child protection mandates put forth by the Security Council should be avoided.

Lastly, the Group underlines that combating impunity and ensuring accountability are key to preventing grave violations. We therefore welcome the efforts of the International Criminal Court against war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the recruitment of children, and note the recent conviction of Bosco Ntaganda in that regard. But, as we heard during the briefings earlier today, we need to recall that true justice involves reparations and psychosocial support for victims of such war crimes, whose trauma may endure for years.

I will now speak in French.

*(spoke in French)*

Allow me now to make some additional remarks in my national capacity. First of all, I would like to warmly thank Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their enlightening briefings. We are honoured that Ms. Kamara has made Canada her home, thereby further enriching our diverse nation. Her courage and resilience inspire us all. I have read her book. I encourage representatives to buy it. I would also like to acknowledge the importance of the sentiment raised by Mr. Awan. The inclusion of that aspect is absolutely key.

As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) clearly indicates, the situation of children in Syria, Yemen and other conflict-affected areas is devastating. To say that we are disappointed that the Council is unable to maintain international peace and security in those and other cases would be a blatant understatement, especially given the number of children who have been killed or maimed simply because of their place of birth or the time when they were born. Addressing vulnerability to serious violations is not the sole responsibility of the Council. We all have a role to play.

Canada's efforts have above all focused on developing the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. The Vancouver Principles are a set of 17 political commitments to undertake measures

to prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

As a testament to the importance of the issue, 91 countries from all regional groups have endorsed the Vancouver Principles since their launch less than two years ago. Canada encourages States that have not yet endorsed the Vancouver Principles or the Paris Principles to do so without delay.

*(spoke in English)*

While important, we recognize that political endorsement alone is insufficient to effect change. For that reason, in the past year, Canada has worked with other Member States, the United Nations Secretariat and civil society to develop implementation guidance for the Vancouver Principles. That new tool, launched here at the United Nations yesterday, serves as a practical resource for military, police and civilian organizations engaged in United Nations peacekeeping operations. It takes a gender lens to our efforts, recognizing the differential impact of child recruitment on boys and on girls.

Canada is putting that guidance into action. In June, Canada's Minister of National Defence announced the establishment of the Roméo Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security, within the Canadian Defence Academy, led by Rear Admiral Cassivi, who is seated behind me. The initial focus of the centre of excellence will be to support the implementation of the Vancouver Principles by our own forces. Canada will also provide the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative with a contribution of more than \$1 million to conduct research and identify best practices regarding the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Canada has been a long-standing advocate for children in situations of armed conflict. During our last tenure on the Security Council in 1999-2000, we introduced the first thematic debate on children and armed conflict (see S/PV.4176). We have collectively come a long way since then but much work remains to be done. Should we be elected to serve again on the Security Council for 2021-2022, we will continue to work to put child protection at the centre of our peace and security efforts.

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

**Mr. Duarte Lopes (Portugal):** I will also speak in French.

*(spoke in French)*

I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this open debate on children and armed conflict. Despite the efforts of the international community, children remain among the main victims of such conflicts. This is an issue that is an absolute priority. I would like to thank Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their personal testimonies and I congratulate them on their courage and their journey, which is so inspiring. I would also like to reiterate my country's support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Virginia Gamba, and thank her for her briefing.

Portugal supports the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, as well as that on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, which was just delivered by the representative of Canada.

Allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/509), which unfortunately describes a very worrying reality of violations of international human rights law against children and highlights a very large number of cases of child recruitment as a tactic of war.

Portugal has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, notable the one on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We therefore call on Member States that have not yet done so to follow that path.

Attacks on schools and hospitals and their use for military purposes cannot continue in impunity. Portugal reiterates its firm commitment to access to education in emergency situations, including higher education, and also calls on Governments that have not done so to sign the Safe Schools Declaration. Education is both a mechanism for preventing recruitment and a means of addressing the root causes of conflict.

We also wish to emphasize the importance of the Kigali Principles and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which complement the Paris Principles. As a whole, those principles should constitute a frame of reference for our future actions.

We must remain vigilant regarding situations of sexual violence against children in wartime. In that

regard, Portugal welcomes the measures taken by the Council with the adoption of resolution 2467 (2019), which has made it possible to identify an approach centred on victims and survivors of sexual violence. In addition, we must do everything possible to put an end to impunity with regard to exploitation and sexual violence. It should be recalled that sexual violence in conflict situations is linked to the broader issue of gender equality, as noted in resolution 1325 (2000). Portugal has just adopted its third national plan for the implementation of that resolution, with clear objectives and a concrete timetable.

In conclusion, I stress the importance that Portugal attaches to the work of UNICEF and other specialized agencies, as well as of civil society, to improve the lives of all those girls and boys who suffer from varying levels of extreme violence. This scourge can be combated effectively only through cooperation among all actors.

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

**Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Permanent Mission of Poland for convening this open debate. As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), we reaffirm the importance of monitoring prevention efforts, particularly in relation to the implementation of resolution 2427 (2018).

The situation of children is becoming increasingly worrisome. The number and severity of violations in countries in conflict, a situation that is evidenced in the reports submitted, demonstrate a reality in which children are victims of State and non-State actors, without a collective, comprehensive response to protect them.

Ecuador expresses its concern about the persistent recruitment and use of children throughout the world. As we know, approximately 420 million children — almost one fifth of the world's children — live in conflict zones. As such, today it is more important than ever that we step up efforts to strengthen the protection of the rights of children in armed conflicts. Ecuador's Constitution recognizes children as a group requiring priority attention. It also recognizes State responsibility for providing support and protecting against all types of violence, abuse, sexual exploitation and exploitation of any other kind, as well as for the eradication of all forms of violence to which children could be subject.

Therefore, as we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and 19 years since the signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, we call for universal ratification of the Protocol and encourage States that have not yet done so to do so without delay.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) also highlights how schools are used for military purposes and the destruction of educational infrastructure. Ecuador expresses its full support for the need to protect students, teachers and educational infrastructure in times of armed conflict.

Finally, we call for strengthening the Office of Ms. Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, so that it receives adequate political support and appropriate funding. We welcome the initiatives that have been carried out, such as the promotional campaign to better protect children, known as ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict.

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

**Mrs. Vives Balmaña** (Andorra) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank you, Madam President, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who joined us earlier today, for convening this open debate and making the fate of children in armed conflict one of the priorities of your presidency.

I would also like to thank the speakers: Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; and, in particular, Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their poignant and inspiring testimonies.

Andorra also endorses the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict.

To read the report of the Secretary-General is to be alarmed by the figures, the extent of the conflicts that involve children and how they have been exposed "to the highest degrees of violence and exploitation" (S/2019/509, *para. 12*). We have heard direct testimony of that here today. It is paradoxical to see that in this year, which marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1882 (1999) in this very Chamber, the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of

the Child and the sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the figures for the six violations, especially children killed and wounded, continue to increase.

The resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the work of the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict, chaired by Belgium, have broadened the areas of focus and the response to the needs of child victims of armed conflicts. To ensure that child victims of conflict have the best conditions for reintegration, it is crucial to raise awareness among all stakeholders and actors. In addition to carrying out her mandate, the initiatives of the Office of Special Representative Gamba, such as ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict campaign, will bring global attention to the fight against the six violations, and the reintegration initiative, managed jointly with UNICEF, will assist in this multidimensional challenge that multilateralism can help to overcome.

Andorra is committed to leaving no one behind. For that, and especially for the protection of children, education — as Ms. Kamara also mentioned — which has proved to be one of the most cross-cutting aspects, if I may say, of the Sustainable Development Goals, is essential. Thanks to education, a three-tiered approach is possible. The first is effective prevention efforts aimed at reducing inequalities, poverty and marginalization. The second is the flourishing of girls and boys, without exception, and of persons with disabilities or mental illness. All aspects must be taken into consideration. The third tier is the fight against the stigmatization of survivors, which is one of the biggest problems facing young victims when they are reintegrated into society. Quality education can bring about the right conditions to prevent crimes against children in armed conflict zones, both upstream and downstream of the problem.

With the growing number of schools attacked — as we learned from the report — or used for military purposes, the Safe Schools Declaration is indispensable. We invite those countries that have not yet done so to join, as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Among the major texts, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers establish the framework that ought to ensure the implementation of peacekeeping operations and prevent recruitment. The International Criminal Court, charged with combating

impunity, is the body that ensures recourse, if need be, to restorative justice.

Andorra supports the rights of children in armed conflict zones as well as the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF. However, I would not like to conclude without expressing our gratitude to all the people and organizations on the ground. Let us help their workers ensure that all girls and boys grow up fully enjoying their rights.

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

**Mr. Bessho (Japan):** First of all, I would like to thank Poland for convening this very important open debate early on in its presidency. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her hard work and for her briefing, as well as Executive Director Henrietta Fore for her briefing and her and the UNICEF team's hard work. I am especially grateful to Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their powerful briefings, based on their personal experience.

Children are vulnerable in conflict, both mentally and physically. In conflict, they are deprived of education. Those children who have suffered are at greater risk of being drawn into conflict and violence again later in life, which in turn undermines sustainable peace and security. The international community and the Security Council must pay special attention to the issue of children and armed conflict.

Japan supports the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers and became a member of the Group of Friends of Reintegration of Child Soldiers in February. We praise the efforts of UNICEF and civil society to meet the extensive, and sometimes unpredictable, needs on the ground. We expect that the forthcoming study of the expert Advisory Group of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers will reveal the specific needs and gaps so that donors can respond more effectively.

Even when child soldiers are returned to their communities, they may face significant barriers to their reintegration into society, including social stigma and economic hardship, which might ultimately lead them back to armed groups. Japan has been working closely with UNICEF in African and other regions not only to support reintegration programmes, but also to provide

broader assistance to children in conflict, such as strengthening national and community capacities for the prevention of conflicts and violence affecting children.

Japan actively supports the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, as a path-finding country and a board member. As the first responding donor, Japan contributed \$6 million last year to the Partnership's fund to support conflict-affected children in Nigeria and Uganda. We call on other Member States to support its efforts.

Children's right to education must be protected even in conflict. Attacks on schools as non-military objectives violate international humanitarian law. We urge all parties to conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and to respect that right. Hospitals are also indispensable for children. We once again urge all parties to conflict to observe resolution 2286 (2016) to protect hospitals in armed conflict.

In conclusion, Japan would like to make positive contributions to helping children in armed conflict with a view to ending violence and preventing future conflicts.

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

**Mr. Edrees** (Egypt): (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, let me congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month by wishing you every success. I also join others in commending you on choosing this topic for today's open debate, and I thank the briefers for their statements, especially Ms. Virginia Gamba.

Today's briefings and the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) on children and armed conflict contain horrifying statistics reflecting an increase in grave violations committed against children. The United Nations confirmed 24,000 such cases in 2018, while killings have reached a record level. That concerns us and should lead us to reconsider our response to ensure that every one assumes responsibility in the protection of children in armed conflict.

Children suffer twice as much owing to the consequences of armed conflicts, for which they bear no responsibility but nevertheless suffer the full impact. Such suffering not only infringes upon their right to life and physical integrity, but also affects their mental health, thereby depriving them of their social, cultural and educational rights. Armed conflicts have

both medium- and long-term repercussions for children and deprive them and their countries of a future.

That bitter reality makes it incumbent upon all of us to safeguard international peace and security. The erosion of international peace and security and the outbreak of armed conflicts compel us to shoulder the responsibility vis-à-vis children and populations not only with regard to protecting them and safeguarding their physical and mental integrity, but also giving them a chance to live new, dignified lives following the resolution of a conflict.

We agree with the Secretary-General in calling on warring parties to take the necessary measures to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. As he underscored so well, it is imperative to cooperate with the United Nations and its specialized agencies to that end. There is also added value in the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General, in particular those calling on parties to armed conflict to respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and military necessity, to allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance in conflict zones while ensuring the protection of children and to strengthen the child-protection capacities of States and regional and subregional organizations.

Furthermore, we agree with the Secretary-General's recommendation concerning the treatment of children suspected of having been involved in terrorist activities, namely, that it is necessary to take a coordinated approach towards resolving it, as it is the result of the systemic exploitation of children by terrorist organizations. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to resolving that issue, which requires close international cooperation. Every State must be allowed the necessary leeway in which to operate to resolve that problem in line with its circumstances and national legislation.

Such facts remind us that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, including children, lies with the State concerned, free from foreign interference, under international legal instruments. We should also not forget the importance of addressing the root causes of conflicts, including social exclusion and poverty, which, as I just said, is incumbent upon the States concerned. The international community must simply stand ready to provide assistance and nothing more.

In conclusion, I reiterate my country's support for the work being done to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict. I underscore that Egypt attaches special

importance to strengthening the capacities of Africa. In that regard, we are chairing the African Union this year. In order to strengthen the protection of civilians and the implementation of international humanitarian law, we will be organizing training sessions in Egypt, while supporting regional cooperation programmes and hosting other relevant events.

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

**Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico)** (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico is grateful to Poland for convening this open debate on a topic that continues to urgently require our attention.

Mexico associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We have an opportunity today to reflect on the progress that we have made and the challenges we continue to face 10 years after the unanimous adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), which Mexico advocated as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict during its most recent term as an elected member of the Security Council. Resolution 1882 (2009) was a fundamental step forward in this area in providing the Special Representative of the Secretary-General with new tools to attribute responsibility to parties to a conflict for rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the killing and maiming of children.

It is unacceptable that such violations of international humanitarian law continue to occur, and all the more so — as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) indicates — that they have reached historic levels since the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children. We deplore the fact that boys and girls are being used as sex slaves and human shields. However, it is encouraging that this past year approximately 13,600 children benefited from release and reintegration. That was largely the result of the effective work of Ms. Virginia Gamba, who has also placed special emphasis on the urgent need to fund sustainable and comprehensive reintegration programmes.

For a child, being recruited or involved in an armed group will always lead to psychosocial trauma. Let there be no doubt about it: above all, such children are victims and deserve proper care. Mexico therefore categorically rejects policies that tend to re-victimize

such children and propagate harmful stereotypes. We cannot afford losing entire generations of children who otherwise could be agents of sustainable peace. It is up to us to ensure that those who took up arms in the past will build lasting peace and prevent the repetition of those tragedies in the future.

Fortunately, no Member State affected by this scourge has to face it alone. We can count on a strong international framework, based on the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, also known as the Paris Principles, in complementarity with the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Geneva Conventions, which remain legally and practically binding.

The work of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children is essential to verifying that such a legal framework is effectively implemented on the ground. We highlight efforts to document statistics related to the release, recruitment and reintegration of children, while we recognize that improvement is needed in the areas of training, collecting data and statistics.

For Mexico, putting human beings, especially children, at the centre of its policies is imperative, which means listening to the needs and aspirations of young people, who share one demand — education. The right to education continues to be one of the first casualties of armed conflict. The United Nations, in particular the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, must redouble their efforts to ensure that education is used as a tool for both prevention and reintegration.

The children and armed conflict agenda, which has evolved thanks to the joint work of the General Assembly and the Council, demonstrates that multilateralism can be achieved when the political will to address multidimensional threats is present. Mexico is proud to have contributed and to continue to contribute proactively to the development of this agenda to the benefit of children.

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

**Mr. Penaranda (Philippines):** Children embody the most compelling justification for the existence of States, that is, to protect their most vulnerable charges as they would preserve themselves. For what is a State without children, if not on the brink of extinction? The

Philippine Government takes its role as protector of children seriously. The Constitution requires it to do so. But in going beyond the demands of the law, Philippine society has accorded children a hallowed place, as treasured assets whose survival must be ensured and whose fullest potential must be fulfilled.

Children do not belong on a battlefield. They have the right not to know first-hand the horrors of war. But it is indeed a harsh reality that far too many children are forced to experience war. In the case of Marawi, in the southern Philippines, children were recruited by armed rebels as fighters, couriers, guides or spies. We are proud that the Government retook Marawi from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in a relatively short time. We denounce with indignation the use of children by criminal groups, and we lament the loss of children's lives. The Government has intensified reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration in Marawi, including expeditiously clearing locations of unexploded ordnance to avoid further casualties and injuries, especially to children.

The establishment of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority and the ratification of the Bangsamoro organic law will pave the way for lasting peace in the region. We note the readiness of the United Nations to help build its capacity to achieve peace, democratic governance and respect for human and children's rights. The Philippines armed forces has issued and committed itself to the circular entitled "Child protection during armed conflict situations", its policy guide to preventing grave child's rights violations. The circular reaffirms the armed forces' moral and legal commitment to ensuring that children affected by armed conflict are afforded special protection and are entitled to special respect.

This principle is enshrined in the Philippine Government's enactment in January of Republic Act 11188, entitled "Special protection of children in armed conflict act". The law reaffirms that children are zones of peace and cannot be recruited into Government forces, or be allowed to participate in armed conflict. They must be treated as victims, not enemies, and be protected from maiming, torture, abduction, rape and killing. They must be treated humanely in all circumstances and should never be objects of attack. Communities, Government authorities and, if applicable, religious leaders are required to preserve the peaceful integrity of children.

Our new law also prohibits attacks on schools, hospitals, places of worship, child development and day-care centres, playgrounds and recreational parks. The Government denounces the use of schools by rebel groups to foster their ideology of war and make soldiers out of children. The Government renews its solemn responsibility to protect those most vulnerable — children — against those malignant forces by any means necessary to achieve the defining purpose of the existence and expense of a State.

The Philippines aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The Philippines congratulates Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. We will continue to work with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Gamba, and with United Nations agencies and other stakeholders in pursuing our common aspiration that no child will ever again have to experience the horrors of war.

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

**Mr. Favre (Switzerland)** (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam President, and Poland for organizing today's open debate on the issue of children and armed conflict. I also express my sincere gratitude to all the speakers for their valuable contributions.

This year we are celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which have been universally ratified. In that regard, Switzerland calls on all Member States that have not yet done so to ratify the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions. Those treaties are essential to the protection of civilians, including children, in armed conflict. I would like to highlight four points.

First, in order to ensure the effective protection of children in armed conflict, the credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005) must be guaranteed in all circumstances. Switzerland therefore requests the Secretary-General to provide a comprehensive, impartial and accurate list of parties committing grave violations of children's rights, supported by reliable evidence. An evidence-based approach is critical.

Furthermore, it is of major importance that all perpetrators of serious violations be listed in sections

A or B of the annex to the reports of the Secretary-General according to clear and transparent criteria. It is also necessary that no party concerned be prematurely delisted as long as it continues to commit grave violations against children's rights. In accordance with the 2010 annual report of the Secretary-General on armed conflict and children (S/2010/181), the timely implementation of an action plan must be the formal and sole path leading to delisting.

Secondly, in order to implement action plans in a timely manner and thereby have a genuine impact on the ground, Switzerland calls on the Secretary-General and Member States to allocate sufficient human, financial and technical resources for the protection of children in armed conflict. It is particularly critical to ensure the adequate allocation of resources and their effective use with regard to action plans involving armed non-State actors. Switzerland supports the deployment and work of child protection specialists, for example, in Syria, whose role is essential to achieving the goals of the action plans.

Thirdly, the Security Council must be more consistent in its consideration of the children and armed conflict agenda with regard to all thematic issues and country situations. We welcome the positive role played to that end by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as illustrated by the recent adoption of the conclusions on Syria and Myanmar, as well as the work under way on Yemen.

Fourthly, Switzerland calls on Member States to take concrete measures to stop attacks on schools and deter armed forces and non-State armed groups from using schools as shields. My country calls on Member States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

In conclusion, Switzerland reiterates its full support for the mandate and work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her Office.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of El Salvador.

**Mr. Trejo Blanco** (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Polish presidency for convening this open debate. My delegation also takes note of and thanks the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2019/509) on children and armed conflict.

El Salvador reiterates its deep commitment to the maintenance of international peace and security by

addressing the heartbreaking consequences of armed conflicts and reducing the widespread suffering they cause against the civilian population, in particular children and adolescents in conflict areas. We express our deep concern that this sector of the population continues to be seriously affected by armed conflicts.

Full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a high priority for El Salvador. My country's Government believes that the best interests of children is of the utmost importance regardless of the circumstances they find themselves in. We therefore find it inconceivable that the forced recruitment of children continues in various regions throughout the world. The use of children in conflict constitutes a serious violation of their rights, while separating them from their families and leading to their tragic maiming, sexual abuse and, in the worst case scenario, pointless deaths. We must continue to work for the promotion, protection and full and effective enjoyment of the rights of children and adolescents, and establish that goal as a priority in our work.

We welcome the progress indicated in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) in this area. We nevertheless regret the significant increase in the number of confirmed violations of children's rights, which is why we demand greater commitment from the international community and condemn the use and recruitment of children and adolescents in conflict.

El Salvador suffered the scourge of an armed conflict that lasted more than 10 years, the aftermath of which has afforded us with countless lessons learned and has allowed us to strengthen our normative framework with the main purpose of not repeating the errors of the past. Emanating from that, we adopted the law for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, which established a series of rights, guarantees and duties with regard to children and adolescents in line with the international human rights framework. The law ensures that, in the event of a disaster or situation of armed conflict, the State must provide all children with special protection based on their rights. It also provides for protection from sexual abuse and exploitation and other forms of exploitation, including the forced and compulsory recruitment of children and adolescents for their use in conflict.

We express our gratitude for all the support that UNICEF has provided at the national and international levels in advocating for better results in the protection

of children in various environments, particularly with regard to the work that it does in various regions for their protection in conflict situations. We believe, however, that it is necessary to step up socioeconomic, psychological and educational support for children to prevent them from continuing to suffer violations of their rights.

At the same time, we believe that it necessary to strengthen reintegration programmes for children who have been released from and left military life so that they can be properly reintegrated through viable alternatives. That will reduce the chances of children becoming vulnerable once again to abuse, social stigma and renewed recruitment.

We believe that it is best to adopt preventive approaches that ensure that all children and adolescents are protected and have an opportunity to augment and strengthen the capacities needed for building their lives. To that end, El Salvador endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in December 2017, as a comprehensive set of measures to end the recruitment of child soldiers.

The Vancouver Principles, whose measures are based on the promotion and protection of the rights of children agenda, constitute an innovative initiative to encourage the condemnation of all forms of abuse and serious violations against children in armed conflict. It is important to implement measures such as those included in the Vancouver Principles in areas in which peacekeeping operations are carried out, while taking into account the impact that conflicts can have on children and adolescents and how precarious achieving the goals of the Organization can be should we fail to take measures to prevent the violation of their rights.

We urge all parties to conflict to respect international law, in particular human rights law and international humanitarian law, and continue to take the necessary measures to end violations of children's rights in armed conflict, as well as prevention, protection and rehabilitation measures as required on a case-by-case basis.

Lastly, I reaffirm that El Salvador remains convinced that the protection of all children in armed conflict must be an important aspect of any conflict resolution strategy and peacebuilding process. Addressing armed conflicts from a comprehensive perspective will be the

key to ensuring the maintenance of peace in various regions throughout the world and its longevity.

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

**Mr. Stefanile (Italy):** We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate, and express our appreciation to the briefers for their contributions.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, as well as with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

Armed conflicts pose a wide range of challenges to minors, increasing their vulnerability and putting them at risk of recruitment, neglect, exploitation, trafficking, sexual violence and abuse, as well as worsening the risk of harmful practices such as early and forced marriages. The issue is very high on the agenda of our country, which attaches the greatest importance to the protection of the rights of children in armed conflicts. This was a top priority during our most recent term on the Security Council, in 2017, and is currently at the core of our mandate in the Human Rights Council.

Together with Belgium, we organized a seminar on the protection of children in armed conflicts in Brussels on 8 July to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We endorsed the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, being cognizant of the crucial importance of mainstreaming these principles into the wider peacekeeping agenda.

We were also among the first signatories to the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration, as we value the key role of education in promoting stable and peaceful societies where children can feel safe to learn and become actors of positive change. We have been devoting particular efforts to the protection of schools ever since. In 2018, we allocated more than 10 per cent of our humanitarian budget to emergency interventions in the field of education and school infrastructure.

We commend the relentless commitment of the Secretariat and of Special Representative Gamba,

as well as the initiatives they promote in order to protect children in conflict, such as the launch of the Act to Protect campaign with the co-sponsorship of the African Union and the European Union. We are convinced that cooperation between regional and subregional organizations is crucial in addressing this problem, as recognized in resolution 2427 (2018).

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509) and the thorough analysis it provides. Huge efforts have been carried out in mediation and peacebuilding, prevention and protection, and for the release and reintegration of children, including through dedicated child protection advisers. There is now an important normative framework in place and legal instruments to enforce the law.

Yet, as the Secretary-General's report clearly highlights, much work remains to be done. More than 24,000 violations were verified by the United Nations across 20 countries. Schools and hospitals continue to be the unfortunate targets of indiscriminate attacks, while children are arrested and detained upon alleged association with armed and terrorist groups. The changing nature of conflicts and their growing complexity, their length and their urban nature are disproportionately affecting children. The statistics on those falling prey to traffickers, terrorist and armed groups exemplify the need for cohesive and urgent action by the international community.

Against that backdrop, we must ensure the full implementation of our political commitments and strengthen our efforts. We need to continue fostering the widest adhesion by Member States to the relevant international instruments, in particular the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, and promote their effective implementation and enforcement. Our interventions should aim at providing a child rights-based response to the problem, bearing in mind the best interests of the children in all actions concerning their lives and treating children separated from armed groups as victims, consistent with resolution 2427 (2018).

Prevention is key. We must engage in reintegration programmes, including psychological support for victims and education and vocational training with special regard to children with disabilities, as stressed by the recently adopted resolution 2475 (2019). Accountability

at the national and international levels remains fundamental. It is also important to continue promoting educational and communicational programmes with a view to raising public awareness on the centrality of protecting children in armed conflicts, involving all governmental and non-governmental actors.

Italy stands ready to face up to this challenge. We are fully engaged and will continue to be committed, in cooperation with the United Nations and the other Member States, to increasing our common efforts to curb this heinous phenomenon and help children return to their childhoods within peaceful and inclusive societies.

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

**Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine):** Ukraine appreciates the initiative of Poland to hold this open debate, as well as your personal participation, Mr. President, in this meeting. We would also like to wish the delegation of Poland every success in its presidency and appreciate the attention it pays to Ukraine.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the issue at hand (S/2019/509), as well as the briefers for their participation and useful presentations.

Before delivering a statement in my national capacity, I would like to note that Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Let me start with the quote of a notable Polish doctor and pedagogue Janusz Korczak:

“Children are not the people of tomorrow, but are people of today. They have a right to be taken seriously and to be treated with tenderness and respect”.

As we mark a number of important dates this year, namely, the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), it is regrettable that universal protection of the rights of the child remains a goal yet to be achieved. The scale of violations committed against children, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report, is nothing short of staggering. Behind dry statistics lie the fates of thousands of children who have lived through horrors and sufferings that few in this Chamber can imagine. When we factor in the issue of underreporting, the picture becomes even bleaker.

It is obvious, therefore, that the work of the United Nations in this area is far from complete. In fact, this challenge warrants more attention and effort today than back in 1989, when the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted, under Poland's leadership. That is why the right and urgent thing to do is to scale up our common actions to ensure that the implementation of existing ambitious resolutions and conventions does not just remain on paper.

Impunity for grave violations against children cannot be tolerated. Military recruitment and the use of children in armed conflicts must finally come to an end. It is equally important to develop effective rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. If we fail to protect our children — or “people of today”, as coined by Korczak — how can we protect the future of humankind?

Thirty years ago, the international community was united in the understanding that children's rights require special protection and a continuous improvement of the situation of children all over the world, as well as their development and education in conditions of peace and security. Unfortunately, as a result of the ongoing Russian aggression, children in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine are deprived of an opportunity to enjoy life without fear, violence and death. They continue to account for numerous casualties from killing and maiming, the indiscriminate use of force, landmines and cluster munitions.

UNICEF confirms that every escalation of the hostilities in Donbas threatens access to water and sanitation for 3.2 million people, including 500,000 children. According to the latest report on the human rights situation in Ukraine by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, almost 150 children have lost their lives in Donbas. Thousands of children have become victims of physical and psychological violence.

It really pains me to show Council members this photograph. Just look at this young face full of hope, energy, life, innocence and optimism. This is 16-year-old Stepan Chubenko, a schoolboy from Kramatorsk, Donetsk oblast, Ukraine. He was a goalkeeper in the Ukrainian first league youth football team, an activist and one of the organizers of a local club called Funny and Inventive People. Those who knew him recall that he was all smiles, even taking care of a children's home in Kramatorsk. He loved life and life loved him back.

A week ago it was exactly five years since his horrendous killing in cold blood by Russian proxies near Donetsk. His three killers first tortured him badly, then fired three shots into Stepan's head — one shot from each of them. Does the Council want to know why? It was simply because Stepan, my young compatriot, had a blue and yellow ribbon on his backpack. Blue and yellow — the colours of the Ukrainian flag. He was killed for simply being a patriot of his own land. The identities of his executioners are well known; at least two of them are hiding from justice in Russia.

The human rights and fundamental freedoms of all residents, especially children, also living in Crimea — temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation — continue to be significantly threatened. Approximately 170 children have been left without breadwinners, with their fathers arrested, abducted or murdered by the occupying Power. That is why I would like to call on the Secretariat once again to include a reference to the situation of Ukrainian children living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine in the relevant thematic reports.

On its part, Ukraine, as party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol and the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, is exerting utmost efforts to develop and secure social protection and reintegration for children who have been affected by the conflict and displacement. In that regard, we greatly appreciate longstanding cooperation with United Nations agencies — with UNICEF at the top of the list — in order to ensure the protection of children. We stand ready to remain a reliable United Nations partner in this crucial area.

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

**Mr. Auväärt (Estonia):** I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important and timely meeting.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Latvia, Lithuania and my own country, Estonia. We would like to align ourselves with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

First, let me reiterate that we strongly support the agenda for children and armed conflict and the mandate of the Special Representative, Ms. Virginia Gamba. We also highly value the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We

welcome the signing of national action plans on children and armed conflict. However, that should be viewed only as the first step, as the successful implementation of the plans is what matters most. We would like to see progress on the ground.

We are pleased and encouraged by the findings of the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509), which shows that the number of children released from armed groups and forces was — for the first time last year — higher than number of children recruited. We welcome the release of 40 boys by tribal armed groups in Iraq, as reported by the Secretary-General, and South Sudan's accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and encourage the implementation of its provisions. This trend should continue.

At the same time, we have learned with concern that verified cases of killing and maiming of children reached record levels since the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We are especially concerned about the alarming increase in the number of violations attributed to State actors and international forces as compared with 2017.

We unequivocally condemn all violations against children and strongly urge for the cessation of such violations and putting effective protection measures in place. We should aim for the full elimination of all grave violations. On sexual violence, let me stress the importance of providing timely and effective support services and gender-sensitive rehabilitation programmes for child survivors. Prosecuting criminals and holding them accountable is paramount in delivering justice and preventing future crimes.

We fully support the inclusive and community-centred reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups. Ensuring access to quality education programmes and providing social and psychological support to children is fundamental for putting long-term viable alternatives to military life in place. Children associated with parties to conflicts should be treated as victims. Their rehabilitation and reintegration should be the primary objective.

We welcome the collaboration between the United Nations and local authorities in the area of Zintan in Libya on the reintegration of children and engagement with armed groups to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, which was mentioned in the latest

report of the Secretary-General. We welcome the good cooperation of the Special Representative with the European Union, including within the framework of the Act to Protect campaign, as we encourage stronger regional cooperation in different parts of the world.

We strongly support a comprehensive approach to the children and armed conflict agenda and look forward to strengthening the capacity of the United Nations in this field. In that regard, we would like to express our support for the highly valuable work of child protection advisers. Monitoring and reporting violations against children is essential in order to achieve progress and prevent future crimes. We hope that the presence of child protection advisers will soon be a common practice, not an exception, in peacekeeping operations. It is no less important to stress the need of predeployment training on children's rights for peacekeepers in order to ensure positive and qualified first contact with children experiencing grave violations against them.

To conclude, let me express our full appreciation for the work of grassroots organizations and activists. We hope that the Security Council can make better use of their insights and advice in future. In that regard, we would like to thank today's civil society briefers — Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan — for their powerful statements based on their own personal stories.

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

**Mr. De Souza Monteiro (Brazil):** I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on an issue of crucial importance. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for her presentation of the Secretary-General's annual report on the issue (S/2019/509). We welcome the briefing by the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, and we also express our appreciation to Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan for sharing their experiences in relation to this important subject.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General shows alarming numbers of violations against children in armed conflicts. This seems to be part of a broader and worrisome trend in which reports of blatant disrespect for international humanitarian law are abundant. Brazil reiterates its strong condemnation of the targeting and use of children in armed conflict and reiterates the

responsibility of all parties to protect them from the direct consequences of war.

In situations of armed conflict, respect for international humanitarian law is a precondition to protect children from violations, including those outlined in the Secretary-General's report, namely, killing, maiming, sexual violence, recruitment and abduction. The current challenges in this area are not the result of a lack of norms, but rather from gaps in implementation. Therefore, our efforts should first and foremost be aimed at guaranteeing that all States ensure respect for international humanitarian law on the part of all parties.

When violations occur, accountability ensues. As a founder of the International Criminal Court, Brazil supports its work to promote accountability for the perpetrators and reparations for the victims. We believe the Court's recent decision to condemn Bosco Ntaganda sent a powerful message to those who commit crimes against children in armed conflict. Brazil hopes that the ruling will help to prevent reoccurrence and contribute to a culture against the involvement of children in hostilities.

Although the Secretary-Generals' report correctly focuses on the six grave violations against children, it is clear that the negative impact of armed conflict on children goes beyond that. War affects the well-being of children as well as their healthy development and access to education. To quote the recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Yemen,

“Children did not start the war [in Yemen], but they are paying the highest price.”  
(S/2019/453, *para.* 68)

That is why conflict prevention should also be at the forefront of our debate. The damage that armed conflict causes children might be mitigated, but it has not been eliminated. In order to protect children, we need to promote and sustain peace. Brazil endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, which represents an important political commitment to ensuring children's education, even during hostilities. Continuing to attend school may offer a sense of routine and stability, thereby alleviating the suffering and chaos caused by war. The Declaration reinforces the idea that schools should be safe havens not targets for armed attacks or places for military use.

Brazil commends the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for launching the ACT to Protect campaign. We underline our support for measures directed not only at ending violations, but also at preventing them and providing adequate services for victims. In this regard, it is always worth recalling that children against whom these violations are perpetrated are victims and should be treated primarily as such.

In conclusion, we reiterate Brazil's steadfast support for the protection of children in armed conflict. While recognizing that the Council is divided on a range of issues, we consider that protecting children from war should be one common denominator capable of galvanizing political will towards peace and respect for international law.

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

**Mr. Prasad (Fiji):** First, let me thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Council on the impact of armed conflict on children. I congratulate Poland on bringing forward this open debate so early in its presidency.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) highlights the world's continuing collective failure to protect children in armed conflicts. The Secretary-General's report highlights grave violations of all international conventions relating to the protection of children in armed conflict. The Secretary-General notes over 20,000 grave violations and over 12,000 deaths and incidences of the maiming of children in 2019 alone. Some 140 million children live in high-intensity conflict zones today.

At the same time, the number of successfully reintegrated children has increased as a result of sustained actions on the ground by UNICEF and other agencies. This is heart-warming. The scale of the challenges, however, calls for a step change. Fiji welcomes the efforts of the United Nations to strengthen measures to prevent, protect and assist children in armed conflicts. Armed conflicts are transforming before our eyes; they are becoming more protracted and more complex, with the growing prominence of non-State actors.

Non-state actors operate across national borders, but they are also increasingly economically strong and independent. They monopolize trade and transit routes

on land and by sea and they capture drug production and supply routes, as well as minerals, fish and other commodities. Children are coerced to enter into this space as forced labour or sexual slaves and in other roles across these criminalized commodity chains. The space between children in armed conflict and children in slavery has therefore become increasingly grey.

Educational and health facilities must remain designated prohibited areas for all parties involved in armed conflicts. Keeping armed parties away from schools is a key step in creating safe spaces for children in conflict zones. Peacebuilding and post-conflict development become so much harder when a whole generation of children are denied education during the conflict period. Fiji is a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration and we urge all Member States that have not yet signed on to it to do so.

United Nations peacekeeping plays an important role in protecting children in conflict zones. Peacekeepers have the reach and capacity to deliver comfort, security and protection. United Nations peacekeeping operations also provide highly specialized skills through their child protection advisers. Since 2001, child protection advisers have been deployed in United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world. They are currently deployed in six United Nations peacekeeping missions and it is paramount that they continue to be well resourced. This function needs to be considerably enhanced and expanded, however. Today, there are only five child protection specialists in United Nations peace operations across the world. This suggests that we are not matching our words with resources.

More women peacekeepers are an important part of a revamped, peacekeeping toolkit that is fit for purpose and can better protect children. Women peacekeepers are far better at identifying sexual violence faced by children early on. Women in medical support units help overcome deep barriers that victims — especially girls — face in accessing medical, psychosocial and other forms of support.

On the part of the United Nations, in peace operations there is a need to better prepare missions for child protection in complex conflicts, including by increasing the number of women in policing, military, corrections and all areas of peace operations. Fiji is committed to strengthening its own capabilities in this area and in better preparing for peace operations.

Fiji has been participating in United Nations peacekeeping for the past 40 years. We understand that the soft skills that peacekeepers bring to communities are paramount. They allow positive rapport to be built between peacekeepers and local communities. This increases the chances of peacekeepers identifying abuse, exploitation and grave violations of the rights of children early and more systematically. These soft skills increase the chances of identifying the weaponization of food, health and other services in conflict zones. The blunt truth remains that more children will die today from the deliberate denial of food and health care than from weapons.

We, as Member States, have given ourselves the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the protection of children cuts across nearly all of them. The SDGs apply equally to communities and children living in conflict zones. The SDGs provide a framework and a lens through which the United Nations system as a whole can interact cohesively with the authorities in conflict zones and systematically across all phases of conflict. As they do so, they will expand opportunities for development and thereby expand opportunities for the successful reintegration of children.

When children are coerced through fear and manipulation to take up arms, we cause irreparable damage to their lives and to the future of their communities. We take away their humanity when they are locked up. Children associated with armed groups are victims — nothing more and nothing less. The United Nations system must do much better in working with highly specialized civil society agencies in reintegrating children at a considerably increased speed and scale.

The Security Council may want to call on the Secretariat to provide fresh proposals to improve the mechanisms, expand the obligations of parties and improve the capabilities of the United Nations peacekeepers and specialized agencies in order to aggressively reduce the unacceptable levels of grave violations of the rights of children in conflict zones.

A step change is needed. That is the minimum we can do to make the Security Council and the United Nations relevant to the 140 million children living in high-intensity conflict zones, who look to us with great hope and with their prayers today.

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

**Mr. Gohar** (Pakistan): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate. We are very grateful that you, the Foreign Minister of Poland, are here to chair this meeting. We also thank the briefers for their insightful briefings today.

Protracted and emerging conflicts, coupled with changing war dynamics and operational tactics, continue to unleash unimaginable horrors. Children continue to be the principal sufferers. They are killed and maimed, abducted to fight, used as human shields, enslaved and sexually abused and denied humanitarian aid. Their rights are violated, dreams crushed and hopes for a better future vanquished.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) confirms these horrors, as 2018 recorded the highest number of casualties as a result of killing and maiming, with the increase in the number of violations being attributed to international forces. For children experiencing enduring distress, conflicts continue to impact their physical and mental health, including feelings of fear, anxiety and depression.

All parties to armed conflicts have a responsibility to protect children from violence, and yet all too often violations and abuses of international law affecting children are rampant. In conflict zones and occupied territories, we are witnessing a deeply troubling breakdown in humanity and a diminishing respect for human life and dignity. Such practices present formidable obstacles to the normative frameworks of humanitarian and human rights laws, in particular the rights of children.

Although a number of steps have been taken since the adoption of the children and armed conflict mandate, and the past 20 years represent significant progress, a great deal needs to be done. There are still gaps in its implementation and obstacles to monitoring the steps already taken. More needs to be done to ensure that the fight against impunity is effective and that those who violate the rights of children are held accountable.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pakistan, as one of the earliest signatories of the Convention and its Optional Protocols, remains fully cognizant of their importance. We have established the National Commission for Child Welfare and Development, which coordinates, monitors and facilitates its implementation.

Let me underscore four specific points that will help us improve the situation.

First, the goal of the protection of children and preventing from them being put at risk can best be achieved by stopping the outbreak of armed conflict. The most effective way to protect children is by preventing and resolving conflicts, ending foreign occupation and working to sustain peace. That must be the top priority of the Council.

Secondly, international law and standards must be upheld. Parties to conflict, including non-State groups, should abide by their commitments under international laws and ensure mitigation measures, in compliance with international law, to prevent grave violations against children.

Thirdly, perpetrators of violence against children need to be identified and brought to justice through national judicial systems.

Fourthly, Government interventions are needed to fund and invest in programmes aimed at rebuilding shattered lives.

Pakistan supports the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, but we also believe that it should not become a tool to achieve political gains and objectives. The legal parameters of that mandate, as provided for by the relevant Security Council resolutions, must be respected. We hope that this principle will be kept in mind in future reports.

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

**Ms. Bavdaž Kuret** (Slovenia): I wish to join others in thanking the Polish presidency for organizing this open debate. The protection of children, especially those in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations, is one of Slovenia's priorities in the field of human rights.

I also wish to align myself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and wish to add a couple of remarks in my national capacity.

We would like to join others in thanking all the briefers. They have our support for their endeavours in the protection of children affected by armed conflicts throughout the world and in the promotion of their rights.

It has been 10 years since the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), which is focused on the killing and maiming of children and sexual violence against children in conflict. This year also marks the twentieth anniversary since the Security Council adopted resolution 1261 (1999), its first resolution on children and armed conflict, on which the protection mechanism is based.

Slovenia shares the concerns of the Secretary-General, presented in his latest report (S/2019/509). The report documents the highest number of verified cases of the killing and maiming of children yet, especially due to explosive weapons used in populated areas. We again call on all parties to conflict to take action to protect children, in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law, respect for which is not a choice but an obligation. We also call on all parties to facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid to children and other civilians in need.

Slovenia has a good and long tradition of supporting projects and activities to protect children from unexploded remnants of conflict and to provide children affected by armed conflict with psychosocial and physical rehabilitation. Our ongoing projects include the following.

First, a mine-risk education programme for Syrian refugee children is carried out by the Slovenian organization International Trust Fund for Enhancing Human Security in northern Jordan.

Secondly, we provide psychosocial well-being services for children and young people from Ukraine who have suffered traumatic experiences due to the armed conflict in the country, and we support the physical rehabilitation of a Ukrainian teenage girl who lost her foot in an explosion.

Thirdly, we provide psychosocial rehabilitation to Syrian refugee children and their mothers in Jordan.

Fourthly, we offer psychosocial assistance to child victims of armed conflict in Gaza and their parents.

In addition, Slovenia is contributing to the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross to address sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to those of UNICEF on behalf of children in Yemen.

Since the development of the protection of children agenda began, the tireless efforts of various actors all over the globe have had tangible results. Efforts such as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers need our continuous support and implementation. We reiterate our call on all States that have not yet done so to also become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We support the recommendations that the Secretary-General presents in his report. We feel particularly strongly about the prevention of violence against children and education both for children and adults, which would empower children to know their rights and claim them and adults to fight the abuse, killing and maiming of and other crimes against children. It is vital that children grow up to be promoters of peace and tolerance and participate in the peaceful settlement of disputes.

In that light, Slovenia will continue to engage in national projects, such as the human rights education campaign for children, entitled “Our Rights”, which is currently being carried out in Morocco and Egypt and has benefitted more than 200,000 children in 20 countries over the past 12 years. We will also continue to support school and peer mediation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We further support the Secretary-General’s call on the Council to ensure that provisions for the protection of children are included in the relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

For the prevention of grave violations against children in armed conflict and non-recurrence, it is crucial that perpetrators be held to account. Slovenia supports the efforts of international criminal justice, especially the International Criminal Court, and in that regard welcomes the recent conviction of Bosco Ntaganda for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including sexual violence and the recruitment of children and their use in hostilities.

In order to complement existing international criminal law, especially much-needed cooperation, Slovenia has, together with Argentina, the Netherlands, Belgium, Senegal and Mongolia, proposed the adoption of a multilateral procedural instrument concerning mutual legal assistance and extradition for the domestic prosecution of the most serious international crimes. We believe that such an initiative would contribute

positively to the protection of children in armed conflict as well.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

**Mr. Al-Mouallimi** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the friendly country of Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August; we wish you every success, Sir.

I also thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for their invaluable briefings, as well as the other speakers. We further thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this meeting and Poland for choosing this very important topic.

I would like to offer the support of my country to the United Nations in pursuing the noteworthy agenda of the protection of children and armed conflict by drawing the attention of the world to the deliberate abuse of children perpetrated by various States and armed groups. We completely condemn that and call for the international community to fight it by all means necessary.

One example of such deliberate abuse of children, including killing and maiming, is the ongoing actions of Israel against children in Gaza and the West Bank, including in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Israel continues to premeditate the killing by gunfire of children who are armed with no more than stones, not to mention its practice of arbitrary detention, torture, killing and injuring of 2,800 Palestinian children in 2018. Another example of that abuse is the recruitment and use of children on the battlefield, as well as training them in barbarous camps, where they chant sectarian slogans. They are further used as human shields or mine clearers, then wept over when their limbs are severed or they are killed in the field.

Yet another example is what Iran is doing in its support of sectarian militias in Lebanon and Syria, especially Hizbullah. The Iranian regime indoctrinates innocent children in military marches and makes them carry weapons and chant slogans that they do not understand. It also continuously supports the Houthi militias, as confirmed in United Nations reports confirming the smuggling of Iranian weapons to

the Houthis, in flagrant violation of resolutions 2216 (2015), 2231 (2015) and 2140 (2014).

The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) fairly recognizes the efforts made by the coalition forces in Yemen to mitigate the injury of children and the significant decrease in the number of casualties in 2018. My country's Government insists that all necessary procedures to protect children in armed conflict be taken in Yemen. We work with our sister countries in the coalition to make the child protection unit, established with the agreement of the United Nations and under the coalition's leadership, a model for replication worldwide, as well as a centre of excellence and knowledge to share with neighbouring countries.

Allow me to say that so far we find that the numbers cited in the report on the casualties of children caused by the coalition forces are overstated. All those figures were taken from areas controlled by the Houthis, and some were impossible for United Nations monitors to verify. Moreover, United Nations bodies failed to provide the coalition command with complete information on the casualties, locations, dates and times. In the absence of accurate data in those areas, those figures amount to little more than guesswork.

However, in the very few cases where the coalition forces were provided with sufficient details, those data were taken seriously, investigations were conducted, detailed reports were made and steps taken to prosecute the perpetrators. We are, in fact, fully cooperating with the United Nations and the Yemeni authorities to take all the necessary steps to return any recruited children who might be found to their countries and to help the Yemeni authorities to rehabilitate those children and reintegrate them into society. We acknowledge that the life of each and every child is very dear and that the natural place for children is in the classroom or on the playground, not on the battlefield.

I would also like to say that the humanitarian aid that Saudi Arabia has offered to the Yemeni people is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, including its most recent contribution of \$40 million to UNICEF for the protection of children. That support, according to United Nations officials, has saved tens of thousands of children from death at the hands of hunger or morbidity.

We hope that the international community will condemn the rebels who continue to refuse to implement resolution 2216 (2015) and who continue to defer the implementation of the Stockholm agreement on the

withdrawal from Al-Hudaydah, which is considered to be the first step towards a comprehensive political solution to restore security, stability and legitimacy in Yemen and put an end to the scourge of war and its impact on the steadfast Yemeni people.

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

**Mr. Skinner-Klée Arenales** (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to commend your delegation, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on a topic of high relevance in the context of today's world. We are grateful for your concept note (S/2019/605, annex), which provides valuable guidance for this debate. We further extend our thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their valuable briefings, as well as to the other speakers.

Since 1999, the Security Council has adopted specific resolutions on children and armed conflict. Each of those resolutions contains increasingly stringent provisions on the protection to be accorded to children. The Security Council has taken a particular interest in preventing children from suffering the tragic consequences of armed conflict. It is clear that comprehensive development cannot be achieved, let alone peaceful societies, without the comprehensive protection of children.

Despite the efforts of the international community to prevent any threat to children, we continue to learn of serious abuses committed against children by armed groups, which not only constitute a grave violation of their human rights, but are also testament to a clear disregard for human life. We are concerned that we are currently witnessing an increase in civilian casualties in armed conflicts, with children falling victim to atrocious and ruthless violence. The macabre scenes of indiscriminate attacks on hospitals and schools, direct attacks on civilians with explosive weapons, air strikes and the use of chemical weapons, which claim numerous civilian casualties — including thousands of children, who are also deprived of their basic rights, if not subject to death — should be sharply sanctioned by the Security Council as the despicable acts that they are.

Guatemala therefore reiterates its commitment to peace and expresses its strong condemnation of the recruitment of children, who are compelled by armed groups to serve as soldiers and, worse still, as human shields in warlike confrontations between parties to

conflict, robbing them of their innocence and even their lives.

It is not enough to be aware of the barbarism afflicting children; we must take drastic steps to prevent those terrible vicissitudes. It is imperative to take additional action to prevent impunity for those who commit serious crimes against children, especially acts of sexual violence and servitude, common abuses in various situations included in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509). We therefore must redouble our efforts to develop effective protection mechanisms focused on the defence of children and to implement the tenets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The devastating consequences of armed conflicts can destroy the social fabric of a country. That is why we believe that the approach on prevention must be reinforced by taking steps to entrench a culture of peace, respect and tolerance. It is indispensable to undertake significant efforts to ensure the protection of children in any broad prevention strategy, including the rehabilitation and reintegration of children in their communities, which would foster sustainable peace, in line with General Assembly resolution 70/272 and Security Council resolution 2282 (2016).

This is also a timely occasion to recall the importance of cooperation and assistance among Member States, as established by the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which my country, Guatemala, ratified on 9 May 2002, in order to coordinate actions and share best practices to prevent, document and address violations against children in armed conflict. We must also support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in collaboration with UNICEF and other United Nations system agencies.

We welcome the Council's adoption of resolution 2475 (2019), on the protection of persons with disabilities, including children, which not only highlights the deep concern about the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on persons with disabilities, including the potential for abandonment, violence and a lack of access to basic services, but which also addresses the assistance and protection needs of all affected civilians.

To conclude, my delegation wishes to underscore our commitment to ensuring and protecting the rights of every child. In May, Guatemala endorsed the Safe

Schools Declaration, joining the 89 countries that have signed on to that initiative, through which strong political support is expressed for the protection of every child and young student, teacher and school buildings. We call on all the countries that have not yet done so to join the initiative. Defending children is a moral and political imperative that sends a message of hope and a clear sign of our collective will. If we continue working together, we will be able to fully live up to our responsibility to protect children — the most cherished part of our population.

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

**Mr. Srivihok (Thailand):** At the outset, I would like to align my statement with that to be delivered by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Let me also join others in expressing my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2019/509), to Poland for convening this open debate, to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her dedication, and to the briefers for their insightful perspectives.

The Secretary-General's annual report plays an important role in guiding Member States on how to strengthen child protection. For that reason, we welcome the enhanced engagement between Member States and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in the preparation of the report. We also welcome further possible regional engagement on that issue. Allow me to highlight a few elements, drawing from our experiences that we feel are relevant to the discussion today.

First, stronger partnership is key. All stakeholders must work closely to address the evolving tactics used to recruit children, including through online and social media platforms. In addition to law enforcement, strong community advocacy and education can provide the best defence for children falling prey to recruitment.

Secondly, mainstreaming child protection into relevant United Nations peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions is vital. In armed conflict situations, peacekeepers are often at the forefront in protecting children. We underscore the importance of having clear mandates and guidelines for their effective operation. Peacekeepers and peacebuilders also need

specific predeployment and in-mission training on issues concerning children affected by armed conflict.

On our part, as a standard procedure Thai peacekeepers are trained to assist the local population in its efforts to prevent the relapse into armed conflict and to ensure sustainable development. Those elements include international law, child protection, gender-based issues, the protection of civilians, conflict-related sexual violence and cultural sensitivity. We have also recently endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Our military personnel — one trainer and one officer who is going to be deployed in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan — will also attend the upcoming United Nations Military Specialized Training on Child Protection, to be held in October in Sweden.

We also firmly believe in the importance of knowledge-sharing and implementing best practices and lessons learned. We are therefore pleased to announce that Thailand is working towards becoming a first-ever regional centre of excellence on the issue of children and armed conflict, bringing our experiences and commitments with respect to the country that will be removed from the report this year, to further strengthening collaboration on the child protection.

We have been working closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In fact, we are pleased to learn that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her team will be travelling to Bangkok at the end of this month, where we will further enhance our collaboration, especially on the regional training course on the issue of children and armed conflict, which is tentatively to be held in Bangkok early September.

The international community must continue its work in all possible ways to put an end to the suffering of children in conflict. Thailand endeavours to do its part and looks forward to working with others to amplify our efforts.

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

**Mrs. Furman (Israel):** I would like to thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their briefings; but most of all, I would like to thank Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their moving remarks.

We, unfortunately, meet here yet again to discuss the horror of children in armed conflict. Every year, many of us end our remarks with words of hope for a better future for the next generation and then reconvene the next year to find the state of children in the world in an even more dismal predicament.

As the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2019/509) on that topic unfortunately outlines, 2018 was yet another record year for the number of children killed and maimed in the context of armed conflict. We support the focus in this year's report on highlighting and condemning the recruitment of children by terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and others. We also welcome recent efforts here at the United Nations to support the reintegration of child soldiers and the creation of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers to support such efforts.

In our region, children continue to be plagued by violence, with 1,854 child casualties reported in Syria and 1,689 in Yemen. In our immediate vicinity, we witness the daily exploitation of Palestinian youth by Hamas and other terrorist groups. Children in Gaza are manipulated and used as human shields in violent protests organized and funded by Hamas at the security fence border in Israel. They are encouraged to fly incendiary kites that burn the fields that feed the families of Israeli children. They are educated using textbooks that incite violence and hatred, rather than being taught tolerance and co-existence. They hear their leaders calling for the killing of Jews. That is no less than child abuse and no less than the most flagrant violation of international law.

In that vein, we note the Secretary-General's recognition of the disturbing phenomenon of the recruitment of Palestinian children by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. We also note his call for Palestinian actors to refrain from encouraging children's participation in violence. However, we still feel that more should be said about the way children are cynically and dangerously used and manipulated in that context by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations.

In the south of Israel, meanwhile, we have witnessed yet another year with massive school cancellations due to Hamas's rocket fire that targets those very Israeli academic institutions. In recent months, we have had days in which over 300,000 pupils have

missed school due to massive rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip. As the Secretary-General's report notes, we have seen rockets and incendiary devices explode in or near kindergartens and school playgrounds. We have witnessed direct rocket attacks on Israeli private homes, which have left Israeli children — including teenagers, toddlers and infants — seriously injured. We have seen a drive-by shooting of a pregnant mother — a heinous act of violence that was praised by the Hamas leadership — which led to the premature birth and eventual death of the newborn infant, Amiad Yisrael Ish-Ran. We were disappointed that this year's report yet again does not include a clear condemnation of the continued targeting of Israeli civilians by rockets and mortars, and we hope to see language to that effect in future reports.

I end my remarks yet again with our sincere hope and prayers that when we reconvene in 2020 to discuss children and armed conflict, we will have made significant progress in keeping children safe. We appreciate the efforts of Member States and international bodies that are trying to improve the fate of children globally, but clearly more needs to be done. We must all adopt a zero-tolerance policy on incitement to violence and stop the abuse of social media to spread hatred, particularly among children. We must teach tolerance and coexistence, not prejudice and hatred, and we must all condemn the terrorist groups that drive the conflict and bring about the maiming, injury and death of children.

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

**Mr. Verdier** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate Poland on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council and organized this debate on a very topical issue. We are also grateful for the briefings delivered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba; the Executive Director of the UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore; as well as Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan.

We also extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2019/509). In that regard, we share his grave concern at the alarming increase registered in 2018 in the number of serious violations of children's rights committed by State actors in the context of the intensification of armed conflicts and their changing dynamics. Moreover, we

wish to express our strongest condemnation of the record levels of murders and maiming of children in 2018, as well as cases of sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals, all of which have had devastating consequences on children.

Argentina has been an active and strong advocate of the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration since its inception, in the understanding that education is fundamental for the development and full enjoyment of human rights. Continuous access to safe education constitutes an essential protection mechanism for children and young people in armed conflicts, helping them to reach their potential and contributing to the building of stronger communities. In that regard, we call on all parties to put an immediate end to grave violations against children, encourage the implementation of all necessary measures aimed at preventing such violations, ensure due accountability for the perpetrators and provide children with appropriate humanitarian assistance to meet their needs, rooted in a human rights-based approach that recognizes children as victims of these grave violations.

We also wish to highlight and express our support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and that of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, for their important initiative, which provides us with a renewed and broader understanding of reintegration, not only in terms of the immediate provision of humanitarian assistance but also as a long-term commitment to ensuring that child reintegration programmes are future-oriented, involve all stakeholders in society and are focused on the specific needs of children.

It should be noted that persons with disabilities, especially children, are among the most marginalized in any community affected by any crisis. In that regard, in line with resolution 2475 (2019) on the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict, adopted in June, we endorse the Secretary-General's call in his report regarding the importance of reintegration being focused on the specific needs of children, including children with disabilities.

To conclude, it is crucial that we consider concrete actions to fulfil the cross-cutting principle of leaving no one behind. Argentina reiterates the imperative need to agree on and implement measures with a view to increasing the pressure from the international

community on State and non-State actors who commit violations against children. Such efforts should be carried out within the framework of absolute respect for international humanitarian law, international human rights law and refugee law. Only by working towards a humanitarian approach to development and peace will we see lasting results in ensuring respect for human rights and the successful reintegration of all children.

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

**Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez** (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our thanks go to Poland for having convened this important open debate. I also wish to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba and Ms. Henrietta Fore for their valuable briefings, as well as the civil society representatives for their moving testimony.

Uruguay aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The figures contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) are alarming and overwhelming. In 2018, there were more than 24,000 verified cases of grave violations perpetrated against children. Cases of murder and maiming reached unprecedented levels. Attacks on hospitals and schools multiplied overwhelmingly in certain regions, including in Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen. Sexual violence continues to be perpetrated against children, often under the protection of ominous silence. Another illustrative fact is that while the number of violations committed by non-State groups remained steady, there was an alarming increase in those attributed to State actors and international forces. That bears testament to the fact that, sadly, it is States themselves that have been responsible for the increase in attacks on the most innocent and vulnerable victims, which is truly reprehensible.

We must put an end to the suffering that is growing incessantly year after year and alleviate the critical situation of children mired in the tragedy of war. To that end, it is essential to properly harness all instruments and mechanisms at the international community's disposal to protect children and defend their rights, as well as to monitor, investigate and punish the grave violations committed against them. Uruguay urges all States that have not yet done so to become party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols — especially that on the involvement of children in armed conflict — to implement resolution

2286 (2016) and to endorse the Paris and Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration.

The increase in the number of child fatalities and injuries is, to a large extent, a result of the growing use of explosive weapons, in particular mines and improvised explosive devices, as well as indiscriminate air strikes in densely populated areas. It is therefore necessary that we continue to work tirelessly on the disarmament agenda and carry out a review on the production and responsible trading of weapons. States must shoulder their obligations in that connection.

The economic interests that fuel the manufacture and sale of weapons should not be allowed to prevail at the cost of the bloodshed and suffering of defenceless beings. Uruguay also values the role played by the instruments available to the children and armed conflict agenda. The monitoring and reporting mechanism is a powerful tool, as is the list annexed to the Secretary-General's annual report. In order to be effective, that list must be independent, impartial and rigorous and should include non-State and State actors alike when there is evidence that they have committed grave violations against children. There is no place on that list for half measures, waivers or exemptions of any kind. In that sense, the ability of the instrument to respond to and prevent such violations will not be impaired.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General also has a decisive role to play. We recognize her continued efforts and those of her team, as well as her valuable initiatives, including the recently established Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, and we reiterate our support for her work. We also commend the tireless work carried out every day by UNICEF in defence of the rights of children in conflict zones.

Accountability is also essential to preventing and combating impunity. The International Criminal Court must be supported, and the Security Council must shoulder its responsibility to refer cases to the Court, when appropriate.

To conclude, I should like to mention a central issue to the recovery of children affected by conflict, namely education. Nelson Mandela, a fervent champion of peace and dignity for all human beings, said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". The testimonies delivered by Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan, who put a face to the statistics and gave a voice to hundreds of thousands

of victims, are proof of that. Together with health care and psychosocial care, we must invest time, effort and resources to ensure that education is available to all, and the international community must collaborate to that end. Education offers valid alternatives for victims facing a future that often appears hopeless and uncertain. Through the transformative power of education, children and young people will acquire the skills and economic security necessary to break the circle of violence, while learning the values of humanity and coexistence that will allow them to build healthy, peaceful and sustainable societies.

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

**Mr. López García de Lomana (Spain)** (*spoke in Spanish*): The two previous speakers discussed the issue of education. Spain also wishes to address that matter.

I should like to begin by reaffirming the widely shared notion that children, and especially girls, are the most exposed victims in any armed conflict. They are vulnerable on account of a twofold defencelessness, both as members of the civilian population and owing to their status as minors. This means that crimes against children are particularly appalling and reprehensible. The protection of children must therefore always remain our priority.

As part of Spain's firm commitment to humanitarian law and diplomacy, which is widely recognized in the Council, I wish to address today the important dimension of education, because an organization without training is an organization doomed to paralysis. In the same vein, a country without access to education is a country without possibilities for development or stability.

In post-conflict situations, education is the key — and practically the only key — that allows access to reintegration, economic prosperity and social reconciliation in coexistence. In the face of those challenges, the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration is an effective political commitment that articulates tangible measures. In May, Spain had the privilege of organizing the third Safe Schools Conference in Palma de Mallorca, following on from those that took place in Oslo in 2015 and Buenos Aires in 2017. Three lines of action underpinned the Mallorca Conference: gender, accountability and doctrine.

First, attacks on schools and the military use of educational facilities have particularly acute

consequences on the gender dimension. In wartime, women and girls are often a specific target — they suffer rape and abduction, they are victims of human trafficking, and they suffer greater atrocities and for longer periods of time, with longer-lasting consequences. In the field of education, girls are the first to leave school and the last to return. We should keep that in mind when we apply the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, which is a fundamental reference point in the Safe Schools Declaration. We cannot simply remove our gender glasses as they are essential to identifying those who are most vulnerable.

Secondly, on accountability, Spain will continue to promote monitoring, reporting and the establishment of mechanisms to attribute accountability for attacks against students, teachers and schools. In that regard, we commend the excellent work of both UNICEF and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, which includes UNESCO.

Thirdly, the incorporation of all of these principles into the domestic legal systems of States is linked to the implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. We advocate the incorporation of these principles into military doctrine manuals, the design of defence policies and the legislation of States parties to the Safe Schools Declaration. Our Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence are already working on organizing a specific seminar on this topic that will take place in the first half of 2020 and will allow us to offer assistance to other countries that are a party to the Declaration that have experienced conflict situations.

The third Safe Schools Conference allowed us to share lessons learned, articulate practical responses and reflect on some of the main challenges that remain. Progress is always the fruit of joint work. The Mallorca Conference brought together 78 national delegations, 13 international organizations and 23 civil society entities. Without their support and without our close collaboration with Norway and Argentina, which we value greatly, none of that would have been possible. Ninety-five countries have so far acceded to the Safe Schools Declaration. We hope to soon surpass the symbolic figure of 100 States and gain further accessions to the Declaration, not only because of the landmark importance of those numbers, but also because it will be a sign of growing support and momentum and promote the effective application of our operational principles.

I conclude by thanking Poland for having convened this debate and especially for its work in the humanitarian field on the Council, culminating in the recently adopted resolutions. I wish to underscore the value of the statements delivered by today's briefers. We are especially pleased to have heard today from Ms. Virginia Gamba and Ms. Henrietta Fore, and we wish to express our most sincere gratitude to both of them for their contributions at the Conference in Palma de Mallorca.

We need to ensure that the Safe Schools Declaration is progressively consolidated as a framework of universal validity — as universal as the principles that support it; as universal as human rights themselves; as universal as the right to life and childhood education.

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

**Mr. Flynn** (Ireland): First of all, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on having assumed the presidency of the Council, and to wish you all the best for the month ahead. I also want to thank today's briefers, in particular Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan, for having delivered such important and moving personal testimony to us here today.

The facts revealed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) are stark. Children remain at the front line of armed conflicts across the world. We have heard this morning that some 13,600 children have been released and reintegrated, which is undoubtedly a positive development. However, that is no cause for celebration, as the same period saw more than 24,000 grave violations against children recorded across 20 countries.

It is evident that in these times of crisis, our common efforts to protect all children from aggression and violence fall far short of where we need to be. Collectively, we must do more. We believe that the Council has an important role to play. In the past year we have seen the Security Council unite to address this issue, including last July with the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018), which states that children recruited by armed groups should be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law, and just recently with the adoption of resolution 2475 (2019), led by Poland and the United Kingdom, on persons with disabilities. That resolution contains important language on the specific needs of children with disabilities affected by

armed conflict. For our part, Ireland was pleased to co-sponsor both of those resolutions.

Our collective challenge now, as ever, is moving towards implementation. One way to do that is to deliver on the ACT to Protect agenda, launched earlier this year by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba. A key action on that agenda is to deliver services to children affected by war. Ireland's international development policy, launched earlier this year, commits us to increasing our spending on education, with a particular focus on emergencies. When violence erupts, children are frequently denied education, leaving them open to indoctrination or exploitation. Education is increasingly being recognized as a vehicle for helping children to deal with trauma and a means to equip children with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and contribute to rebuilding their communities and countries. That forms a core part of our third national action plan on women and peace and security, which, along with our new development policy, contains a commitment to delivering on a target of a quarter of a billion euros to improve global education, especially for girls in conflict-affected areas.

We are also supportive of reintegration programmes, which are fundamental to realizing the rights of the child, ending the cycle of violence and ensuring sustainable peace. This year, Ireland joined the Group of Friends of Reintegration of Child Soldiers. Such groups help to shed light on how the legacy of conflict continues to affect children long after the guns themselves have been silenced. We also need to do more, as Special Representative Gamba said here earlier, to reduce the devastating impact caused by land mines, improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance.

We must work to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and, importantly, strengthen accountability for all violations. Ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law is all the more important in a context of the increased urbanization of conflict, in which the risk of violations is greater. These violations, including the denial of humanitarian access and attacks against schools, medical facilities and personnel, are utterly unacceptable. The Security Council must play its role in ensuring accountability and referring violations to the International Criminal Court, and the Council must work to ensure that any referral is accompanied by ongoing support for the Court, particularly with respect to the execution

of arrest warrants and the provision of adequate financial support.

In conclusion, we must do more to implement the resolutions of the Council. We must ensure respect for international humanitarian law and demand accountability for its violation. We must continue to listen to testimonies like those of Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan and heed their calls for action. Put simply, we must do more to protect our children. This is a priority for Ireland, and with the support of our partners here at the United Nations in the near future, it is a topic on which we would work actively as an elected member of the Security Council for the term 2021-2022.

I thank you again, Mr President, for having organized this important debate. I can assure you of my country's continued commitment to working with our partners here at the United Nations and globally to protect children from all forms of aggression and violence.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

**Mr. Ham Sang Wook (Republic of Korea):** I would first like to congratulate Poland on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council, and I assure you, Mr. President, that Poland can count on the full support and cooperation of my delegation. I also join previous speakers in commending your initiative to convene today's important meeting, and I thank the briefers for their inspiring briefings.

Over the past 20-some years, we have endeavoured to advance the protection of children in armed conflict and have achieved some progress to date. However, we cannot deny that there remains a significant gap between our goals and the harsh realities that we continue to face. It is simply appalling that, in 2018 alone, more than 24,000 verified violations were committed against children globally and that the number of casualties as a result of the killing and maiming of children reached record-high levels.

Against this disturbing backdrop, and while aligning myself with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, I would like to highlight three points of particular importance in addressing this challenge.

First, I would like to emphasize the strategic significance of reintegrating children affected by

armed conflict. The Republic of Korea, as a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, recently hosted three consultations and side events with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. We place a high priority on this issue because we believe that the better reintegration of former child soldiers will help to fundamentally break the vicious cycle of violence.

Child reintegration programmes must take a community-based approach in order to avoid stigmatization. We must convince communities of the reasons for which children need to be both accepted and supported by their communities, and the best way to do so is to ensure that the communities see and enjoy the concrete benefits that reintegration programmes bring. Furthermore, child reintegration — with its inherent community-based nature, long time frames and broad range of programmes, which include education, vocational training, health services and psychosocial support, inter alia — is the perfect example of where greater coherence and coordination are called for among the peace and security, development and humanitarian pillars of the United Nations.

Secondly, we must do more to address sexual violence against children. Resolution 1882 (2009) expressed deep concern about the appalling levels of sexual violence committed against children in armed conflicts. Ten years have now passed since the adoption of that resolution, and it is deeply alarming that the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) still documents more than 900 verified cases of sexual violence against children. A survivor-centred approach is of the utmost importance, while timely and comprehensive support to ensure non-discriminatory and multisectoral assistance to all survivors of sexual violence, including the clinical management of rape and the provision of medical, psychosocial and legal services, is essential. These were some of the points raised last month in Seoul as the Republic of Korea hosted the first International Conference on Action with Women and Peace. The Conference focused on building a strong global partnership to combat sexual violence in conflict and benefited from the active participation of leaders from Governments, international organizations and civil society.

Thirdly, we must ensure accountability for all violations committed against children. Strengthening accountability and abolishing impunity is the key to

ending gross violations and preventing recurrence. Those who have committed grave violations against children must be held accountable through both national and international justice systems, including the International Criminal Court. At the same time, we must support efforts aimed at strengthening State institutions, centring on truth, reconciliation and justice with the use of other tools, including, among others, monitoring and reporting mechanisms established by the Security Council, the listing of violators in the Secretary-General's reports and targeted sanctions to seek accountability.

The Republic of Korea will continue to work closely with the international community in our collective efforts to protect children from the scourge of armed conflict.

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

**Mrs. Tripathi (India):** We wish to congratulate Poland on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and also wish to thank today's briefers.

It has been two decades since the Security Council established the children and armed conflict agenda. The importance of preventing and ending violations against children in armed conflicts in order to achieve sustaining peace is now well-recognized. Given that the scale and severity of the grave violations perpetrated against children remain on the rise, it is clear that there are significant challenges to the effective implementation of this mandate. We would like to make four points in that connection.

First, grave violations continue to be perpetrated by a range of actors in complex situations of armed conflict. Terrorist networks and other non-State actors continue to exploit children for their own nefarious ends. In some situations, the nexus between the State machinery and the non-State actors pose complex challenges. The impunity of all such actors must be ended through resolute action by Governments from whose territory such entities operate. The international forces operating in areas of armed conflict must also ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law and relevant human rights law in all their responses.

Secondly, there are well-established international norms to protect children in armed conflicts. Today's challenges arise out of the inability to abide by those established norms. We must focus on consolidating

emerging positive trends, such as more parties to armed conflicts engaging with the United Nations and releasing and reintegrating children recruited by different parties. Better integration of child protection provisions in peace processes and greater accountability for violations against children are crucial in that regard. Constructive engagement with the national Government concerned in the formulation and effective implementation of child protection action plans is integral to durable peace. Preventing persistent attacks on schools, especially girls' schools, and ensuring health care also call for greater attention.

Thirdly, based on our experience of United Nations peacekeeping over the decades, we understand the importance of peace operations having sufficient resources, commensurate with their mandate, and the requisite number of child protection advisers on the ground, for the effective implementation of child protection programmes.

Fourthly, I stress the importance of a credible, impartial and transparent implementation of the mandate given to the United Nations system. Despite the Council's clear mandate, we are disappointed that the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) includes situations that are not armed conflicts or threats to the maintenance of international peace and security. That attempt to selectively expand the mandate to certain situations only politicizes and instrumentalizes the agenda, thereby obfuscating and diverting attention from the real threats to international peace and security.

We are cognizant of the urgency to act now to protect today's child victims in order to prevent tomorrow's armed conflicts. India remains a committed partner of the United Nations in that endeavour.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of San Marino.

**Mr. Beleffi** (San Marino): San Marino aligns itself with the statement delivered previously by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate, and would like to thank the briefers for their contributions. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2019/509). This year's report indicates once again that an enormous number of grave violations persist across the world. We firmly condemn such violations

and continue to support the children and armed conflict agenda and mandate. We welcome the effective implementation of existing action plans and the signing of new ones.

While August marks the 10-year anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), it is regrettable that children in armed conflicts continue to pay a very high price — they continue to be killed, maimed, raped, abducted and recruited as soldiers. In addition, more and more children are living in areas of war. Because of prolonged conflicts in densely populated areas, civilians, including children, are under direct attack. We express our deepest concern for the high number of boys and girls killed and maimed by indiscriminate attacks against civilians, and we urge all parties to uphold their obligations under international law.

Many children have been killed, injured and traumatized by the use of explosive weapons. The use of such weapons in urban warfare is also destroying their homes and vital infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and water- and electricity-supply systems. These attacks cause a disruption of basic services in the daily lives of civilians. Boys and girls have to flee their homes. They cannot go to school or receive the medical attention they need. Furthermore, schools have been targeted or used by armed forces for military purposes. As a result, students have been denied their right to learn and to have a better future. We firmly condemn such acts, which deprive boys and girls of their right to an education.

San Marino recently joined the Safe Schools Declaration, a political commitment to better protect students, teachers, schools and universities during war, with the aim of enabling young people to continue their education. We believe that education is a powerful tool for peace. As such, it should be supported, respected and promoted. We therefore urge other countries to join this instrument.

San Marino believes that the most vulnerable groups deserve special attention. We therefore sponsored the recently adopted resolution 2475 (2019), with its focus on the needs of children with disabilities in times of conflict.

San Marino also supports the ACT to protect children affected by conflict campaign, which seeks to increase awareness about the six grave violations against boys and girls, including how to stop and prevent them. It is fundamental to raise awareness,

improve the conditions of affected children and prevent future crimes against them.

Finally, this year San Marino signed on to the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, another important instrument for the prevention of the recruitment of children as soldiers.

We are extremely pleased about the release of more than 13,000 children from armed forces and armed groups. We would like to commend the work of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for its dedication and tireless efforts. We need to continue along this path and raise awareness, free children from recruitment, stop the horrific violations, support children's recovery from conflict-related trauma and work systematically for their rehabilitation.

Protecting children should be an integral part of any peace process. We should not forget that we can make a huge difference in the lives of these boys and girls. By helping children in conflicts, we are sowing the seeds for a better and more peaceful world.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the *Chargé d'affaires ad interim* of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

**Mr. Van den Akker:** I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would first like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate, as well as to congratulate Poland on taking up the presidency of the Security Council. I must also pay particular tribute to our two civil society briefers, Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan. I would also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Executive Director Henrietta Fore, both for their briefings today and for their continued leadership.

We thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2019/509), which identifies some positive developments. But it is troubling to note that the total number of grave violations, which was already quite significant, has further increased. That includes over

12,000 cases of killing and maiming. It is clear that we must do more to address this particular violation in a context where the use of indiscriminate and excessive force, notably in urban areas, is leading to increased numbers of child casualties. Many of those children suffer long-term disabilities, and we welcome the adoption in June of resolution 2475 (2019), co-authored by Poland and the United Kingdom, which addresses the specific needs of children with disabilities in situations of armed conflict.

We also welcome the adoption in April of resolution 2467 (2019), at the initiative of Germany, which acknowledges that women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence in armed conflicts and includes important new commitments on the protection of girls and boys from sexual violence, as well as children born of sexual violence.

The United Nations system is equipped with a range of tools to protect children in conflict situations. We salute the work of UNICEF and other United Nations child-protection staff working in countries affected by conflict. We are carefully monitoring the so-called consolidation process of protection functions in peace operations and would welcome a Secretariat briefing on it at a later time. We welcome the signing of new action plans, as well as the Special Representative's continued efforts in that regard. Of course, the signing of an action plan is not an end in itself. We must remain focused on implementation.

The annual report on children and armed conflict plays a crucial role by providing us with verified and impartial information collected through the monitoring and reporting mechanism, and the lists in its annexes are an essential tool in holding parties accountable. It is vital that the integrity and objectivity of both the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the listing process be maintained. The EU hopes that the subdivision into two sections within each of the annexes will be a basis for maintaining the high level of requirements for delisting and will create incentives for listed parties to swiftly take effective measures to protect children.

The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, currently chaired by Belgium, continues to make a vital contribution. We welcome the recent adoption of conclusions on Syria and the clear condemnation of the Syrian regime for its actions, as well as the adoption of conclusions on Myanmar. The

ACT to Protect campaign launched by the Special Representative in April, should make a valuable contribution to awareness-raising and strengthening efforts to end and prevent all six grave violations against children.

Accountability is an essential element of prevention, and those responsible for grave violations must be brought to justice. The EU reiterates its continued support for the International Criminal Court. In resolution 2427 (2018), the Security Council stated that children formerly recruited by armed groups should be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law. That includes children formerly associated with violent extremist groups, whose human rights must be fully respected in line with international law. Unfortunately, in some areas of the world, we see the prosecution of minors and their parents taking place without the required due process and safeguards. This is an issue of grave concern for the European Union.

The children and armed conflict agenda remains a high priority for the European Union. We support efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children, secure their release and ensure their comprehensive and successful reintegration through long-term interventions that follow a rights-based approach and incorporate a gender perspective.

A full version this statement has been submitted to the Secretariat.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the observer of North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

**Ms. Hutchinson:** On behalf of NATO, I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council on the occasion of today's open debate on children and armed conflict. I would like to thank all the briefers this morning for their very powerful interventions.

This year NATO celebrates its seventieth anniversary, which provides an opportunity to reflect on its achievements, but also to look to the future, because NATO's core values of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law underscore our work on protection of civilians, in particular the protection of children and armed conflict. We applaud the efforts taken by the Security Council and by the international community, especially those who work tirelessly on the ground to protect children. We also welcome Special

Representative Gamba's ACT to Protect initiative, and we look forward to engaging on this and other initiatives.

NATO recognizes that protecting children from the effects of armed conflict is both a moral imperative and an element essential to breaking cycles of violence. Since the topic of children and armed conflict was first addressed at the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, we have made great progress in developing practical, field-oriented measures to address conflict-related violations against children. From the North Atlantic Council's adoption in 2015 of the policy document entitled "Protection of Children in Armed Conflict — Way Forward" to the recent reaffirmation of the policy at the 2018 Brussels Summit, NATO's commitment to the protection of children in conflict areas has become a prominent piece of our overall protection-of-civilians approach.

However, it is on the ground, at the operational level, that we get to see our commitments turned into good practices, and where we have bolstered our protection mandate, giving specific attention to the protection of women and children. We are proud of all our efforts undertaken to elevate the protection of children in NATO-led missions and operations. Together with the United Nations, we have these developed practical, field-oriented measures to address conflict-related violations, including adopting standard operating procedures on the six grave violations.

In Afghanistan, NATO's Resolute Support Mission, a non-combat mission, was established to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The Mission continues to be vigilant in demonstrating its commitment to delivering on the principles of child protection through training and capacity-building. And NATO officials continue to use opportunities to raise the issue of protecting children in their political and military engagements with senior Afghan officials.

Predeployment training is critical to articulating principles and translating them into operational effect. Such training has therefore become mandatory in NATO for all personnel deployed to our missions and operations. Our children and armed conflict policies are also being systematically incorporated into our military-exercise scenarios, which means that NATO commanders receive training to respond to situations where the six grave violations committed against children are encountered.

While training alone is not the answer, it does ensure that personnel recognize that children are among the different populations affected by conflict, and those deployed to protect are trained to prevent, recognize and respond to any and all violations. To support both training and mainstreaming of the children and armed conflict agenda, focal points for children and armed conflict have been appointed throughout the NATO command structure. NATO focal points work with the United Nations and other international actors to share reports and information wherever possible.

While we are proud of what we have achieved, there is still much more to do. As we look to the future, we will continue to guarantee that our commitment to this agenda is steeped in action. This year we aim to better outline our political commitments and support extant efforts aimed at monitoring instances of grave violations committed against children and at enhancing the training provided to all NATO personnel.

On this tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), we echo the concerns about rape and other forms of sexual violence committed against girls and boys. We will therefore focus on protection from sexual violence in the new holistic policy approach that we are currently developing. Of great importance is the desire to strengthen our coordination with other international actors to promote children's rights, enhance accountability and further adhere to international law and norms. Working together is the only way we can achieve this agenda. NATO looks forward to sharing some of our good practices with our international colleagues and to identifying areas of mutual collaboration, including with the United Nations and the European Union, and especially with civil society.

It is obvious that challenges remain, obstructing the full implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda. Details of violations against children are too often taken for granted in global reporting on armed conflict, and action seems dwarfed by increasing numbers of child casualties. The international community has a responsibility to guarantee that children — all children — are protected. It is a collective responsibility, and one to which NATO is fully committed. Protecting children today prevents conflicts in future — and it is to that peaceful future to which NATO looks forward.

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

**Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan):** I thank His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland and commend the Polish presidency of the Security Council this month for convening today's open debate. We express our warm appreciation to all of today's briefers for their comprehensive reports. We commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's team, UNICEF and the Department of Peace Operations for their coordinated efforts to put an end to grave violations against children. We also pay tribute to the non-governmental organization (NGO) community, which makes a sterling contribution to upholding children's rights.

I will begin by expressing deep concern over the scale, complexity and severity of the grave violations committed against children in armed conflict in 2018, especially over the highest-ever number of child casualties, as outlined in the Secretary-General's latest annual report (S/2019/509). At the same time, the overall reduction in the number of incidents of child recruitment and attacks on schools, as well as the strong consensus among Member States on the importance of this issue, indicates that positive change is achievable.

In that regard, Kazakhstan would like to propose the following recommendations, aimed at mobilizing our collective will to safeguard more 400 million children affected by conflict.

First, we must promote full compliance with international law and strengthen accountability for grave violations against children. It is vital that all Member States ratify and strictly implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant treaties. We also encourage Governments to endorse the international tools related to the protection of children in armed conflict, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and to include child-protection provisions in peace processes, especially with non-State armed groups. I am pleased to note that my country has ratified all the relevant treaties and endorsed all international initiatives related to the protection of children.

Secondly, we need to prioritize preventive measures. It is evident that children's access to education, health care and basic services is a key element of conflict prevention and the building of sustainable societies. Therefore, investments in development and education, providing better living conditions and meeting the socioeconomic needs of children are critical to preventing the recruitment of and grave violations against children. Supporting capacity-building at the local and regional levels and the promotion of tolerance are equally important in this regard.

Thirdly, we must increase support for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children affected by armed conflict. Adequate, predictable and sustainable funding must be provided to ensure the rehabilitation of children on an immediate basis. Moreover, we must rethink our approaches to reintegration and establish long-term programmes that will help children more effectively reintegrate into society. We therefore supported the establishment of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers. Together with France and Malta, we are co-chairing the Coalition's Group of Friends of Reintegration. We believe that the new approaches elaborated by our Coalition will help children more effectively return to normal life and not only succeed in their communities, but also become catalysts and agents of change.

Lastly, we support the Secretary-General's call on Member States to engage closely with the United Nations to facilitate the return of children and women who are actually or allegedly affiliated with terrorist groups, with the best interests of the child in mind. Kazakhstan has had the unique experience of bringing home safely from Syria a total of almost 600 Kazakh citizens previously involved with the Islamic State, including more than 156 women and 406 children, during the Zhusan humanitarian rescue operation. Government agencies, in cooperation with NGOs, clergy members and volunteers, took the measures necessary to provide medical and psychological assistance to the victims and are continuing their rehabilitation at specially created regional centres.

I will conclude by reiterating Kazakhstan's commitment to all collective and comprehensive measures to ensure the safety and welfare of children, our most precious resource and, at the same time, the most vulnerable group in times of armed conflict.

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

**Mr. Amayo (Kenya):** May I begin by congratulating Poland on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs for having convened this important meeting. We believe that this open debate presents an excellent opportunity to reaffirm our strong support for this important mandate on children and armed conflict.

Allow me also to commend Ms. Virginia Gamba, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Peter Awan for their comprehensive briefings this morning.

My delegation takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509) and acknowledges the many activities undertaken with the aim of improving the lives of children in conflict. We believe that action plans, participation in ceasefire negotiations and démarches with various countries have contributed to improving the lives of the innocent children who are made victims of conflicts and strife. We have no doubt that the recommendations contained in the report will enhance the broad and effective protection of children in armed conflict, including those in schools and hospitals.

Over the past decade, the world has witnessed an increase in violent extremism and extremist ideology propagated by terrorist groups to advance their negative agenda, including the targeting of children for recruitment into violent extremism.

Kenya decries the recruitment and use of children as weapons of war. We believe that it underlies larger and systemic issues that include the breakdown of a country's social fabric. As such, child protection should be part and parcel of any conflict-management and prevention strategy. In that regard, we appreciate the progress made through the current monitoring and reporting mechanism and by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

We note with dismay the prevailing challenges with regard to the protection of children growing up in situations of conflict. The fact that children are subjected to reprehensible acts of violence and abuse must move humankind to reimagine the responsibility to protect. It is indeed our collective moral imperative, besides being a legal obligation.

In a number of developing countries, the major root causes of conflict include extreme poverty;

political, social and economic inequality; and high unemployment. For these reasons, restless young people, most of whom are still children, are easily enticed to fight and also fall into radicalization, with minimum economic incentives.

I therefore would conclude by focusing on three important points.

Firstly, I stress the importance of the balanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in addressing the economic development challenges that are at the root of most conflicts. We believe that the Sustainable Development Goals offer the most cost-effective and sustainable impact in alleviating poverty and conflicts and affording all children the bright future they rightfully deserve.

Secondly, we call on the Security Council not only to maintain peace but also, as a priority, to use its mandate to bring peace to areas that are in conflict. That will require the cooperation of the entire United Nations system and the international community in contributing to the pacific settlement of disputes.

The protection of children will be guaranteed only where there is peace and where national laws and international humanitarian law are observed and implemented. This calls for the continued observance by all nations, big and small, of the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Last but not least, there must be an acknowledgement of the important role played by regional and subregional organizations in developing regional policies to guide their members in developing common national action plans for child protection during conflict. We can work together and do more to ensure a world in which children, those of this generation and generations to come, can have and enjoy the right to be children.

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

**Mr. Siddig (Sudan):** Let me congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and assure you of our cooperation with you. I would like to extend my appreciation to Poland for organizing this particular meeting of the Security Council to deliberate on the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509). My delegation is appreciative of the role played by Mrs. Virginia Gamba and her efforts to reflect the dreadful situation of children in

armed conflict. The Secretary-General's report is self-explanatory. In that regard, my delegation is also highly appreciative of and thankful to UNICEF, under the leadership of Executive Director Ms. Henrietta Fore. We thank UNICEF for the valuable work that its staff do all over the world for the protection of children. The testimonies and personal experiences reflected before us this morning by two young people from Africa stand witness to the gravity and brutality of internal conflicts and their impact on children. Their accounts reflect how young people are subject to killing, maiming and all kinds of cruel treatment.

Cognizant of our responsibility towards the welfare of children and abiding by all international instruments that govern the rights of the child, it is time to stand together to put an end to the conscription and recruitment of children in armed conflicts. It is time to prevent armed groups, rebel movements and State and non-State actors from exposing children to the scourges of war.

During the past few years, with the assistance of UNICEF, the Sudan was able to release child combatants from some armed groups and hand them over. Psychosocial assistance was extended to them and their reintegration into society was conducted in an acceptable manner. They were able to overcome their trauma and healed. Ultimately, they were integrated into their families.

My Government recently extended a unilateral ceasefire throughout the conflict areas in the Sudan. Some of the armed groups in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan have reciprocated accordingly. That, of course, is a step in the right direction for the political settlement of armed conflicts in my country. In negotiating the political settlement agreements with arms bearers, the issue of children and their protection will be highly prominent and reflected in those agreements.

It is well known that the Sudan played a large role for the sake of stability and peace in both South Sudan and the Central African Republic. The Republic of the Sudan acts with other African States and the African Union as guarantors to those agreements. In following the implementation, my Government will endeavour to guarantee the rights of children in both countries, perhaps through additional addenda to preclude any violation of child rights.

Peace, stability, political settlements to the strife of conflict, quelling the sound of guns and creating job opportunities are among the measures followed by my Government to safeguard and protect children from the effects of war. In cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF, national and local institutions are in place to implement the joint plan of action signed with the United Nations in 2016. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has visited the Sudan twice. The Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict has also visited the country.

In our endeavour to protect children in conflict areas, the Sudan pays special attention to and places emphasis on three measures: first, the training of armed forces, particularly those integrated into law enforcement bodies, on standing operating procedures; secondly, launching and sustaining awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of protecting children from any violations and encouraging the reporting of any attempts to conscript children into armed forces; and thirdly, the full and strict scrutiny of age during the selection of recruits.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the readiness of my country to cooperate fully with Mrs. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict. We also affirm our full commitment to the international legal framework on children, to which the Sudan is party.

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

**Mr. Raum** (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to congratulate Poland on organizing this public debate on the situation of children in armed conflict, as well as all speakers for their valuable work and testimonies. I would also like to thank Belgium for the work that it is doing at the head of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Luxembourg fully endorses the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2019/509) on the situation of children in armed conflict begins with the sad observation that violations were significantly higher in 2018 than in the previous year. They represent the unacceptable daily plight of more than 24,000 children living in conflict situations. Thousands of

children are held in detention centres for suspected foreign terrorist fighters in conditions inappropriate to their age and vulnerability. All children recovering from a traumatic environment must be considered first and foremost as victims. Their psychosocial care and rehabilitation must be a priority.

In two days, we will mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), which added the killing and maiming of children to the serious crimes recognized by the normative framework on children in armed conflict. The Secretary-General points out in his report that more than 12,000 children were killed or maimed in 2018. The resolution has therefore clearly not lost any of its relevance.

In a number of modern conflicts, the denial of access for humanitarian aid to civilian populations is used as a weapon of war. Children are the first victims. That is a serious violation of international humanitarian law. The use and targeting of schools and hospitals for military purposes expose children to many dangers, such as bombing, abduction and recruitment by armed groups. The stalemate in many conflicts means that generations of children see their access to education severely curtailed. That is tragic for the individuals and whole societies are thereby threatened with stagnation.

Schools continue to be the target of deliberate attacks. School facilities are regularly looted or diverted from their primary function to be used for military purposes. We urge all Member States that have not yet done so to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. We call on all States to take the necessary measures to implement resolution 2143 (2014) and thereby deter the parties to a conflict from using schools for military purposes.

In 2018, the Secretary-General documented a very high number of cases of sexual abuse against girls and boys in the various ongoing conflicts, knowing that the recorded figures are certainly much lower than the real figures given that a large proportion of such crimes are never reported. Impunity in the face of sexual violence encourages its recurrence. Where national justice cannot perform the task, the perpetrators of and those responsible for such crimes must be tried by international criminal justice and, ultimately, by the International Criminal Court.

For the children and armed conflict mandate to be effective in combating impunity, it is essential to provide resources that are allotted to establishing

reliable mechanisms for data collection, unimpeded access and security for monitoring staff.

On 20 November, we will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is therefore crucial that we act today to protect the rights of children and ensure that those rights are enjoyed.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

**Mr. Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam):** I have the honour to speak on behalf of 10 member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

We wish to congratulate Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. We thank its delegation very much for organizing today's debate on this very important subject. We also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba and the other briefers for their insightful briefings.

More than two decades have passed since the first-ever open debate on this topic took place in the Chamber (see S/PV.3896). ASEAN welcomes positive developments in the protection of children in armed conflicts. We are also encouraged by several measures put forward, such as Youth 2030 and the launch of a process of proactive engagement with national, subregional and regional actors. However, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509), we remain deeply concerned about the highest number of verified cases of the killing or maiming of children, the untold suffering of thousands of children forcibly used or recruited as human shields, suicide bombers or sexual slaves and the damaging effects of attacks on schools and hospitals. We also note that protracted conflicts, devastating tactics of war and disregard for international law are among the main causes. Against that background, we believe there is a strong global consensus to move forward that agenda. We also believe that a stronger consensus is needed to turn those commitments into meaningful action.

We appreciate the efforts of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism established by resolution 1612 (2005). We support continued constructive engagement with member States in the use

of accurate, objective, reliable and verifiable information in reporting to ensure the integrity and credibility of the work of the Special Representative. While we also encourage engagement among the United Nations and parties to conflicts, we reaffirm the principle of the primary responsibility and authority of States to protect their civilians in armed conflicts. We believe that a comprehensive approach is needed to address the root causes of the hardship that children bear.

At the regional level, ASEAN continues to be engaged in protecting the rights of children in armed conflicts. In October 2018, the ASEAN Dialogue on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was held to raise awareness on the implementation of the rights of the child. ASEAN also closely cooperates with United Nations agencies. In 2018, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children held an annual dialogue with the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children. As we mark the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), ASEAN remains strongly committed to combating violations of the rights of children and shall continue to engage with all our partners to continue that vital work for the betterment of our children.

Allow me to speak in our national capacity. As the Chair of ASEAN in 2020, we will work closely with other ASEAN countries to promote existing arrangements and explore other possibilities. We are of the view that the Security Council, with its primary responsibility, needs to focus more efforts on conflict prevention and resolution. Cooperation among the United Nations and regional organizations could be enhanced to provide more effective protection for our children. We are deeply grateful to non-governmental organizations and individuals who work on the ground to bring about a profound impact on children's lives and inspire others.

As a country growing out of the ashes of wars, we underline the importance of a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of conflict, with high priority given to ensuring that education continues during conflict time, as it not only empowers children but also tackles the root causes of conflicts, by cultivating and promoting the culture of peace in the hearts and minds of children. We also share the view that we need to pay greater attention to address the issue of explosive remnants of wars and their negative

effect on livelihoods, environment, public health and socioeconomic development.

Viet Nam is proud to be the first in Asia and the second in the world to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. During our first tenure in the Council in 2008 and 2009, we had the valuable opportunity to work closely with other countries for the unanimous adoption of resolution 1882 (2009). We are committed to working closely with the States Members of the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to promote and protect the best interests of children affected by armed conflicts.

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

**Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq)** (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my country would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Poland, President of the Security Council this month, for holding today's constructive dialogue. We wish Poland every success in presiding over the Council this month.

We would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Peru for the judicious manner in which he steered the work of the Council last month.

We would also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; Ms. Mariatu Kamara and Mr. Majok Peter Awan for their valuable briefings. In that regard, allow me to present our observations on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) of 20 June.

Iraq commends the role of United Nations offices in my country. However, we also urge international organizations, independent experts and special rapporteurs to work within their mandates to provide accurate information in their reports and to verify the sources of that information. Unreliable sources continue to be used to compile reports that reflect inaccurate information. We also regret the fact that the Secretary-General's report does not take into account the observations and recommendations submitted by Iraq in note 238 of 10 May.

Furthermore, paragraphs that were added were not shared with my country's delegation and their accuracy was not verified. In paragraph 71, the report notes that the Iraqi Federal Police recruited five boys to protect a security checkpoint. We looked into the matter and

determined that that information was inaccurate. That begs the question: Do Iraqi security forces, which have waged a fierce war against terrorism, need five children to protect a security checkpoint? At the time, the Council and many United Nations officials had commended the professionalism of every rank of the Iraqi security forces during military operations against terrorists, while prioritizing safeguarding and protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Terrorist organizations enjoy both the means and the ability to wage attacks on civilians everywhere, including schools and hospitals, which has been demonstrated by incidents throughout the world. The content of paragraph 76 of the report of the Secretary-General therefore does not correspond with what took place on the ground. Furthermore, that information dates back to 2016 and 2017, and we do not see the need to mention it in a report covering 2018.

We are deeply concerned about the report's description of what transpired in Iraq as issues between parties to the conflict. On many occasions, Iraq has demonstrated that what happened in our country was not a conflict between parties. It was a war waged by the State against a terrorist organization that had little regard for humankind and territorial sovereignty. It perpetrated the most heinous crimes against the Iraqi people, as corroborated in dozens of Security Council resolutions and reports.

The Iraqi judiciary exercises its independence in rendering its judgments, and the justice system in Iraq conforms to international norms. The Government in Iraq is clearly making an effort to ensure just and transparent trials, while guaranteeing the rights of all. We are making the necessary adjustments to rectify the legal status of children as victims of terrorism. Our delegation reaffirms our full support for all United Nations efforts to provide a safe environment for children.

We urge the relevant United Nations Offices to verify the accuracy of the information contained in their reports, to provide evidence and to cooperate with the Iraqi Government. The Iraqi Government will spare no effort to hold accountable those who violate the law. The approach used in the annual report of the Secretary-General to ascertain information, however, is nothing other than an additional burden on a country trying to recover from the fierce attack waged against it.

In conclusion, we are commemorating today Saddam Hussein's invasion of the friendly country of Kuwait, which was a crime and has no relevance whatsoever to the morals of the Iraqi people. Since the fall of that dictatorship, Iraq has been working hard to build good-neighbourly and mutually beneficial relations with Kuwait, based on mutual respect.

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

**Mr. Hau Do Suan (Myanmar):** My delegation congratulates you, Madam President, on Poland's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are confident in your wisdom and able leadership. I can assure you of our full support and cooperation. My delegation also thanks Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and the other briefers for their briefings today.

Myanmar is committed to ending and preventing violations and abuses against children. We have taken important steps, such as establishing domestic preventive mechanisms and cooperating with international partners, especially with the United Nations and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Recently, on July 24, the Union Parliament enacted the much-anticipated child rights law. The new law is the most comprehensive child law in Myanmar with extensive provisions concerning the rights of children and the prevention of all forms of violence against children, including the six grave violations.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention of the Six Grave Violations during Armed Conflict was established on 7 January 2019. Consultations are now under way to develop an action plan for the prevention of killing and maiming of and sexual violence against children. Since the signing of the joint action plan with the United Nations in 2012, almost 1,000 minors have been released and reintegrated into the community. Most important, verified cases of new recruitment have dramatically decreased over the years to only a few dozen at present.

The Government has conducted training workshops in cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. As recently as June 2019, a total of more than 14,000 persons, including more than 7,500 military personnel, were provided with legal training workshops on the Geneva Conventions

and the six grave violations. Moreover, nationwide the public awareness campaign to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Tatmadaw has been in place since it was launched since 2013.

Myanmar is now in the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, the Myanmar youth policy, adopted in 2017, specifically identifies former child soldiers as one of the 11 categories of vulnerable youth and children who require special attention and protection. Myanmar is also cooperating with the International Labour Organization to end forced labour and established a complaint mechanism for reporting the recruitment of underage persons for military service.

The Government of Myanmar has never condoned human rights violations, especially crimes against the most vulnerable people, including women and children. Perpetrators have been tried and prosecuted in accordance with the law. Actions have also been taken against military personnel who were involved in unlawful recruitment activities and violations.

We believe that achieving lasting peace is indispensable to ending the suffering of innocent civilians, particularly women and children in armed conflict. Bearing that in mind, the Government of Myanmar has reconvened the 21st-Century Panglong Union Peace Conference to deliberate and strive for achieving lasting peace and building a democratic federal union. During its third session held in July 2018, the Conference adopted the elimination of the six grave violations against children and the protection of children's rights as social-sector basic principles.

I would like to express my Government's appreciations to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba and her Office for their constructive engagement. We also thank UNICEF and the United Nations country team for their important contribution to the implementation of the joint action plan. We believe that the protection of children in armed conflict rests primarily with the Government concerned.

At the same time, the United Nations and the international community can play a vital role by providing assistance to Governments in building their capacity and strengthening their ability to protect children. It is also important to acknowledge and encourage positive developments. Only through constructive engagement and cooperation, will we be

able to achieve our ultimate aim to end the suffering of children in armed conflict.

I can assure the Council that we shall continue to work hand in hand with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and other international partners to end grave violations against children and build a better future for our children.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

**Mrs. Alhefeiti** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Poland on its accession to the presidency of the Council this month and commend it for convening today's important debate. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, for her briefing at the beginning of the meeting. I take this opportunity to reiterate the deep appreciation of the United Arab Emirates for her important mandate. Finally, we thank the representative of UNICEF and the other briefers for their presentations today.

My country takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509), introduced by the Special Representative on the current status of children and armed conflict. We are deeply concerned about the gravity and scale of the threats faced by children in the Middle East — from the ever-increasing violations committed in Syria, to the killing and detention of Palestinian children by Israeli forces, to the recruitment of children in Yemen by Houthis and in Iraq and Somalia by terrorist groups, such as Da'esh and Al-Shabaab.

The United Arab Emirates adds its voice to that of the international community and reiterates its full commitment to alleviating the suffering of children through the provision of humanitarian assistance. The United Arab Emirates has demonstrated the great importance it attaches to the needs of children by providing more than \$5 billion to Yemen and its people over the past four years, including, most recently, through our joint pledge with Saudi Arabia of an additional \$240 million in funding for the operations of the World Food Programme (WFP).

Our humanitarian efforts are also directed towards the long-term interests of children threatened by conflict, such as their education. The United Arab Emirates firmly believes that education is not only

the right of every child, but also an essential tool for uplifting entire communities in order to mitigate conflicts and the exploitation of children therein. To that end, we have provided educational assistance for more than 270,000 students through the WFP, built the equivalent of 150 classrooms as temporary education spaces and provided UNICEF with \$35 million to pay teachers' salaries.

Given our emphasis on the importance of education, we are deeply concerned by the Houthis' exploitation of children, schools and educational centres in Yemen and the damage and destruction they have wrought on facilities. In particular, we deplore the Houthi militias' use of schools as centres for storing arms and for recruiting, training and detaining children. Such actions demonstrate total disregard of their obligations under international law. In that connection, we urge the Security Council to hold the Houthis accountable for their grave violations.

The United Arab Emirates, as a member of the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen, formed at the request of the legitimate Government of Yemen, takes this opportunity to once again reaffirm our commitment to complying with our obligations under international humanitarian law. The coalition takes its responsibility to protect all civilians in armed conflict, particularly children, very seriously. The coalition also continues to work closely with the United Nations and other international partners to enhance the protection of children in Yemen, as reflected in the memorandum of understanding the coalition signed in March with the Office of the Special Representative.

We believe that the coalition's efforts contributed significantly to the decrease, in the last quarter of 2018, in incidents reported by the Secretary-General. Ultimately, however, the best way to protect Yemeni children is through peace and stability. In that regard, the United Arab Emirates supports the full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement and the United Nations-led political process.

We all must do more to ensure that children in conflict areas receive the special protection to which they are entitled under international law. Accordingly, we call on Member States to utilize the relevant platforms to discuss evolving challenges and short- and long-term needs for reintegration, and to generate recommendations to address funding gaps.

In conclusion, we urge both the Council and the States Members of the United Nations to study and adopt innovative responses to sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict, including by strengthening engagement with local women and girls as active partners in the design and implementation of humanitarian action.

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

**Mr. Imnadze (Georgia):** Let me first join my colleagues in congratulating Poland on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. I thank the Polish presidency for convening this timely debate. I also want to thank all the briefers. Their briefings were heart-breaking and some of the stories were not easy to listen to, but we thank them. That information is very much needed and appreciated.

My country, Georgia, aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. Let me add the following remarks in my national capacity.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the landmark resolution 1882 (2009), but regrettably, 10 years later, boys and girls around the world continue to live with the horrors of grave violations of their rights — killing and maiming, recruitment and exploitation, rape and other forms of sexual violence. Children are the most vulnerable group and make up the highest percentage of casualties of war, which last year reached a staggering, record number of over 12,000. The Secretary General's latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509), which takes note of those figures, is absolutely appalling.

While we deplore those grave violations in the strongest terms, it is also apparent that we, as Member States, need to redouble our engagement and do much more to support and strengthen child protection mechanisms. In that sense, we welcome the steps outlined in the report to improve the situation of conflict-affected children globally, and appreciate the significant efforts of United Nations agencies and partners, including child protection actors working on the ground.

Children and young people are exposed to even greater risk of abuse when educational facilities become the targets of attack during conflicts. That is in addition to being deprived of their right to education and thus of the realization of their hopes for the future. In that

context, let me underline the importance of the Safe Schools Declaration, which is a significant instrument for taking concrete actions towards safe schools for all and thereby strengthening, in practice, the protection of children and youth in armed conflict.

When it comes to the prevention of forced recruitment and the use of children as soldiers, strengthening adherence to the relevant international legal instruments is of key importance. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977, Georgia is committed to upholding the norms for the prohibition of recruitment and use of child soldiers. In that connection, let me also mention that we recently endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

While the Government of Georgia spares no effort to protect children, their fundamental rights in Georgia's occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia continue to be violated by the occupying Power. The prohibition of educating ethnic Georgians in both regions in their native language remains a matter of the greatest concern. In 2015, the Georgian language was banned as a language of first-grade instruction at the remaining Georgian schools in the Gali district, gradually resulting in the total ban of native-language education in the Abkhazia region. Teachers are subject to immense pressure, with frequent raids at schools and kindergartens, with the aim of uncovering evidence of the use of the Georgian language, followed by frequent repercussions. Since September 2017, education in their native language has been banned in Georgian schools in the Tskhinvali region as well.

Multifaceted restrictions on freedom of movement further impede access to education, as children who cross the occupation line to attend classes in Georgian schools located in the vicinity of the Georgian-controlled territory fall victim to Russian occupying forces and must endure the forced inspection of their schoolbags. If Georgian books are found, they are detained for hours and suffer other forms of harassment as well. The closure of the only remaining so-called crossing point in the Abkhazia region in July has further exacerbated the situation by preventing schoolchildren from participating in exams for enrolment in the universities located in the territory controlled by the

central Government. The arbitrary closure of the crossing points causes additional problems for children, such as access to health care, thereby making the grave humanitarian conditions in the occupied regions even worse.

In an attempt to address the issue of protection of children and their rights in the occupied territories, the Georgian Government's peace initiative, entitled *A Step to a Better Future*, also seeks to improve the humanitarian, social and economic conditions of the population, including children and young people, residing in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali by, inter alia, enhancing their educational opportunities. Despite the difficult context, I reaffirm Georgia's strong and unwavering commitment to the protection of the fundamental rights of the child. In that context, let me also underline the importance of the international community taking a consistent and firm stance on safeguarding children's rights in conflict-affected areas everywhere in the world, including the occupied regions of Georgia, so no one is left behind.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

**Father Charters:** I would like to thank the Polish presidency for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict.

The theme of our discussion today should cause us to stop and reflect. The juxtaposition of children and armed conflict is deeply incongruous yet, as we are hearing once more in this Chamber, it is the sad reality for so many boys and girls in our world that young lives are interrupted tragically by violent conflict. Children, who should be free to learn and to play, as they grow in knowledge of themselves and of the world around them, are instead the victims of grave violations that not only rob them of the unique and irreplaceable joys of childhood, but also run the risk of causing long-term physical, emotional, psychological and social damage, with its obvious impacts on their families and wider community.

As the latest report of the Secretary-General dramatically shows,

“In times of armed conflict, throughout the world, millions of people, children foremost among them, have inadequate access to or have been denied

assistance that is essential for their survival and well-being” (*S/2019/509, para. 11*).

One has only to consider the scramble for minerals and other precious resources in parts of Africa, where so many children and young people give up their education to work in mines. It is worse still when children are forced to fight in wars not of their making or recruited under the guise of being able to provide for their impoverished families.

There is a need to examine the root causes of this situation, particularly how socioeconomic disadvantages and lack of prospects too often make armed conflict an alternative for our young people. It is also deeply worrisome that in some cases radicalization and extremist ideologies have motivated the decision of young people to embrace nefarious causes, and thereby become themselves the cause of destruction and despair in the lives of so many others. Education towards peace in the family and in schools and the crucial role of women as teachers of peace are indispensable to confronting these root causes.

Long and protracted conflicts, often fought in urban settings, mean that schools, medical centres and shelters often come under fire, leading to the partial or complete destruction of buildings essential for the health, instruction and well-being of children. Such indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks are in contravention of international law and international humanitarian law and must stop. In that regard, Pope Francis recently expressed his deep concern for the lives of children caught up in bombings in the Idlib province in Syria.

The Holy See takes note of the evolution of United Nations peacekeeping operations to include provisions for child protection and outreach to armed groups, inform and educate the wider population and create a culture of peace. There are also new initiatives manifesting the will of Member States to end and prevent the grave violations committed against children living in armed conflict. It is particularly encouraging that such initiatives include working towards the universal ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Today's open debate must contribute to awakening the collective conscience of the international community so as to ensure that these children, who are often invisible, are not forgotten, that increased efforts

be made for the release of child soldiers and that the young victims of other grave violations are given the support they need for reintegration. Such support must include the most vulnerable, including those children conceived and brought into the world as a result of conflict-related sexual violence. Children in those circumstances have no less dignity, and similarly must be protected from violence and death.

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

**Ms. Zahir (Maldives):** My delegation wishes to congratulate Poland on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and thank it for its efforts aimed at peacefully resolving some of the long-standing conflicts around the world. Let me also extend our appreciation to all the delegations involved in bringing the issue of children and armed conflict — and the severity of the crisis in war-torn areas — to the forefront of our attention. I also wish to thank the briefers for their updates to the Council.

The Maldives is deeply concerned to learn that over 24,000 violations were committed against children across 20 countries, as documented in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509). Furthermore, attacks on schools and other educational facilities severely hamper access to education and restrict the development of children in affected areas. We concur with the findings and the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report and urge all Member States to consider them recommendations carefully.

My country is committed to ensuring that the rights of the child are protected and that every action taken is in the best interests of the child. The Maldives ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts in 2004. We did so in the belief that an international instrument to address the grave issue of children in armed conflicts could be holistically addressed through the various mechanisms, responses and assistance programmes. However, it is clear that more needs to be done, especially at the international level.

While the Maldives has worked towards the incorporation of the Convention into its own domestic legislative framework, work remains ongoing to further improve and amend the existing legislation to reflect our human rights obligations with respect to the rights of the child. The Maldives will strive to improve

stakeholder coordination in strengthening the child-protection system. Despite much effort, we continue to face mounting challenges on human-resources capacity, technical expertise and childcare services. As we work to promote and protect the rights of our children, we are also committed to protecting the rights of children all over the world. The dreams of a child in the Maldives are the same of those of a child in Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine or anywhere else in the world.

We as the international community must collectively ensure that children caught up in the horrors of war are not swept aside due to indifference, or allowed to be caught up in diplomatic bureaucracy. We must decry each and every abuse — of any magnitude — loudly and clearly for all ears to hear and for all hearts to bleed in sympathy. Sexual violence against children can never be tolerated, and we need every country to implement protection laws at the national level. The United Nations must also keep enforcing its zero-tolerance policies.

We call for the full implementation of resolution 2427 (2018) and for assurances that accurate and timely reports will be collected and promptly reported to national, regional, subregional and international governing bodies and institutions to protect children's welfare. We must further accelerate our efforts on providing resources and support to those already victimized. Complex challenges such as the denial of humanitarian aid as a tactic of war are exposing millions of children to hunger, disease, homelessness and sexual exploitation, leaving their dreams shattered. Strength in the battle against evil can be achieved only through the consolidation of our efforts.

The Council must ensure the implementation of the agenda on children and armed conflict through the appointment of dedicated child-protection advisers in every peacekeeping mission and must engage in conflict-resolution negotiations as a priority for the protection of children in the process.

As outlined in resolution 1882 (2009), Member States must protect and provide support for children in armed conflict, including children with disabilities. There is a worrisome tendency to overlook children with disabilities, whose natural brilliance may be less evident to our superficial sensitivities. Yet they require a gentle hand to pull them away from malign environments that may cause them permanent harm. Member States must also provide children with disabilities with the resources necessary to ensure their

health and safety while also providing a normative lifestyle among their peers.

Let me conclude by expressing the full support of the Maldives for the Secretary-General's efforts in addressing this grave situation. We remain deeply saddened by the reports of children caught up in war-torn areas, in detention facilities and in other vulnerable situations where they may be open to exploitation, sale or prostitution. The Maldives will always defend the innocence of the children of the world and the future that they hold in their hands.

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

**Mr. Fernandez De Soto Valderrama** (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs for having convened this open debate, which is of great importance for the Organization in the process of endeavouring to extricate children from situations of conflict. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their briefings today and for all the work that they have been doing in the context of this important task. We also wish to convey our gratitude to the other briefers for their reports.

As stated in the concept note convening this debate (S/2019/605, annex), it is vital that we understand that protecting and caring for children affected by armed conflict is key to achieving sustainable peace. Successful reintegration is critical to any peace process, especially when it comes to the reintegration of boys and girls who, from a very tender age, have known nothing other than the tragic effects of violence.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) refers to the situation in Colombia, highlighting the various serious violations of the rights of children perpetrated by illegal armed groups. The main outcome presented in the report makes it clear that the Colombian State has striven to fully guarantee the human rights of children, boys and girls alike. Those efforts include the issuance of decree 1434 of 2018, which substantively strengthened public-policy guidelines for preventing the recruitment, use, sexual exploitation of and sexual violence against boys, girls and adolescents. The adoption of that decree represents the conclusion of more than 10 years of work to fight, in a coordinated manner, the recruitment of and other serious violations against children perpetrated by illegal armed groups.

In 2007, we also established an intersectoral commission for the prevention of the recruitment of children and other grave violations of the rights of the child, which will continue to serve as the main body tasked with devising strategies aimed at eradicating the problem.

Unfortunately, despite the tremendous efforts and strong commitment of the Colombian State to eradicate this painful situation, that example has not been replicated by all the organized armed groups, which continue to recruit and to use boys and girls in violation of the international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In particular, the self-styled National Liberation Army, which is still included on the list of parties committing grave violations of the rights of children, has continued to recruit and use children as part of its illegal activities against the State. For instance, on 4 July that illegal armed group showed on social media a series of videos showing boys, girls and adolescents engaging in propaganda activities for the group, in clear contravention of the provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

By the same token, the use of anti-personnel mines by that group not only affects children's right to life and to personal integrity, but also, in areas where the National Liberation Army has a presence, prevents children from realizing their right to education and health care without putting their lives in danger. The National Liberation Army has systematically refused to take measures aimed at enhancing the protection of children; instead, the group has sought to ratchet up the intensity of the hostilities against Colombian society, including terrorist attacks such as the one perpetrated against the General Santander Police Academy, which took the lives of 22 young Colombians and which was condemned in the strongest terms by the Security Council on 18 January.

The Government of President Duque has placed special emphasis on the importance of the transition to civilian life for the hundreds of children who had been recruited by the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo. We are aware that despite the strenuous efforts of the Colombian State, challenges remain in relation to this issue, which is why our institutions will continue to work to strengthen prevention strategies, in line with

the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Finally, Colombia takes good note of the various concerns and challenges that persist in the country in this respect. We are committed to preventing boys and girls from being used to wage war and will continue to work and to do ever more to comprehensively address the issue of their integration and education.

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

**Mr. Kemayah (Liberia):** We thank the Security Council, under the presidency of Poland, for having organized this open debate on children and armed conflict. We express our thanks to UNICEF and to the other briefers for their inspiring reports earlier today.

We take note of the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) and its findings. The uncomfortable truth remains that the scale and severity of the violations being committed against children continue unabated in several regions of the world, with wanton disregard for international law as well as international norms. It is also regrettable that incidents involving the abduction, killing and maiming of children have reached a record level globally, as have attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access to children, while the future of millions of children living in countries affected by armed conflict remains at risk. The situation deserves the utmost attention.

As we observe the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), we call on the Council to reinforce its provision that all parties to armed conflicts adhere to the obligations applicable to them under international law.

There is a dire need to address the gap in funding for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict, especially child soldiers. Adequate funding will support Governments and regional and subregional organizations in building child and social protection capacity and in formulating prevention strategies. We therefore urge that priority be placed on addressing the root causes of conflict so as to ensure prevention.

The traumatic and excruciating impact of armed conflict, particularly on children, cannot be overemphasized.

Within the ambit of our national flagship development plan, the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity

and Development, the Government of Liberia, under the astute leadership of His Excellency Mr. George Manneh Weah, espouses the promotion of democracy, good governance, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.

Hence, having transitioned from conflict to peace and given that young people, who constitute 63 per cent of our population, are the building blocks for the sustainability of peace, security, democracy and development in our country, the Government of Liberia has at the core of its Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development programmes to strengthen child and social protection.

We commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for advancing the mandate of this very important Office. We particularly laud the initiative launched in April of this year under the ACT to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign. The initiative seeks to generate greater awareness and action in order to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

Finally, on behalf of Mr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia, the Government and the people of Liberia, I wish to express our unwavering support for the commendable campaign ACT to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict.

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

**Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria):** At the outset, allow me to extend our appreciation to Poland for convening today's open debate and to the Secretary-General for the annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509). I would also like to thank the briefers, especially Ms. Kamara and Mr. Awan for their remarkable work and for their dedication and determination to improve the well-being of children.

Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union. I would like to highlight a few aspects of significance to my country.

The fact that this year's report registers a spike in a number of the categories of grave violations that are subject to monitoring and recording is highly alarming and testifies yet again of the horrific impact and disproportionate effect that armed conflicts have on children. There were more cases of verified killings

and maiming in 2018 than in any previous year. Sexual violations have also reached an all-time high of 933 verified cases. We need to ask ourselves what we have done to address the situation and what else we can do.

The international community has taken some important steps in that direction. Resolution 2467 (2019), adopted earlier this year, has a strong focus on the protection of children from sexual violence and addresses children born of sexual violence.

Children are indisputably among the most vulnerable groups during conflicts, which is even more valid for young persons with disabilities. Resolution 2475 (2019), adopted last month at the initiative of Poland and the United Kingdom, which Bulgaria also co-sponsored, highlights that children with disabilities require sustainable, timely, appropriate, inclusive and accessible assistance. Furthermore, Bulgaria shares the view that mental health, reintegration, rehabilitation and psychosocial support are a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of a child suffering the consequences of a conflict, and we welcome the work by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mrs. Virginia Gamba and UNICEF in that regard.

The objective of today's debate is to find measures to remedy the challenges related to children and armed conflict. Bulgaria is convinced that prevention is key. Therefore, child protection and sexual violence training for civilian and military personnel is crucial before embarking on a mission. Bulgaria has endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which are an instrument to operationalize child protection within United Nations peacekeeping.

We are deeply concerned that very often children allegedly associated with armed forces or groups are being treated as perpetrators or a security threat, not as victims. Detentions are not yet considered as a measure of last resort. Therefore, the monitoring of and reporting on the detention of children for being associated with armed forces or groups need to continue and finding alternatives to detention should be a priority.

Despite all the initiatives that have been put in place, we need to improve efficiency and admit that children's human rights are still being systematically violated and abused. Furthermore, even with the significant decrease in cases, humanitarian access is still being denied to many children. Therefore, we urge all conflicting parties to stop the violations and take

action to prevent them from occurring in the future. We also call on all States to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles. Bulgaria is convinced that fighting impunity for such grave crimes is an international concern. We continue to see the role of the International Criminal Court as essential in that regard.

To conclude, we need to do a great deal more to ensure that children are protected, and we need to do it consistently. Our main focus should be on prevention and on ensuring that those already affected have a chance to live in dignity and to flourish.

**Mr. Al Omoush (Jordan)** (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank Poland for having organized this open debate on children and armed conflict. We also commend the efforts of Peru at the helm of the Council last month. We wish you, Madam President, every success for your presidency this month. We also thank the various briefers whom we heard this morning.

It has been 10 years since the adoption of resolution 1888 (2009). We continue to see increased numbers of violations being committed systematically against children in armed conflict. The first victim is humankind. The report of the Secretary General (S/2019/509) cites a series of record numbers of violations committed as a result of conflicts around the world. According to the report, there were 24,000 cases involve children and 12,000 cases of killing and maiming in 2018.

In a number of resolutions, in particular resolution 2472 (2018), the Security Council has stressed the need to protect civilians in regions affected by armed conflict, especially the most vulnerable, namely, women, children and persons with disabilities. We also have resolution 2475 (2019), but major impediments still exist to noble efforts to uphold justice and peace throughout the world. We must therefore work tirelessly to end the wars by addressing their root causes and the negative impacts of such crimes.

We are convinced that there is a need to promote legislative and legal reforms and develop policies that will allow us to address violence against children during armed conflict. We also believe in the importance of accountability and of ending impunity in order to stop such crimes and deter perpetrators, and in the need to

establish protection and reintegration mechanisms for child victims of violations of all kinds. Like all other peace-loving countries, Jordan has endorsed a number of international instruments on the rights of the child, such as the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. Those texts reaffirm that our priority is protecting children and upholding relevant principles in United Nations peacekeeping operations, while also seeking to end the recruitment of children and to protect children during wars and conflicts.

When participating in peacekeeping operations, my country is committed to protecting the most vulnerable, in particular children — boys and girls alike. It is also committed to helping them reintegrate into society. The role of a peacekeeping operation is no longer merely to stabilize the situation in conflict areas, but now also includes protection and reintegration, as well as psychosocial and health-care services, provided through various educational programmes and income-generating activities that protect children from recruitment and exploitation.

My country hosts approximately 1.3 million refugees from Syria; of those, 226,000 are children between the ages of 5 and 17. In spite of the challenges related to refugee flows and the negative impact of the situation on our national economy and infrastructure due to the scarcity of natural and economic resources, we in the Kingdom of Jordan have been able to turn that challenge into an opportunity thanks to collaboration among State institutions, on the one hand, and through international and regional partnerships, on the other. It is all part of a plan to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis.

My country has established and strengthened mechanisms and measures to accommodate the refugees, while also ensuring that they can live in dignity by assuring them shelter and basic services, such as health care and education. We also have mechanisms offering support and protection for women and children, in particular girls. My country has also launched various training and rehabilitation programmes in cooperation with our regional and international partners, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations to ensure that refugees can pursue their education, build on their skills and integrate into society.

The key to our organization is its vision, which is translated into several initiatives. A summit will be convened next month, on the sidelines of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly,

to review progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. We hope that it will be an opportunity to redouble our efforts to achieve our objective of open, modern societies with adequate and effective institutions, anchored by international and regional partnerships, that empower women, protect children, assist young people, build on the principles of peace and reject radicalization, hate speech and terrorism in all its forms.

We must reinforce relevant international instruments that protect children and ban their recruitment by armed forces or armed groups. They must be reintegrated into civilian life so that they are immune to the forces of evil in the world. In that regard, I applaud the ACT to Protect campaign launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, which will enable us to focus on ending the violations perpetrated against children in armed conflict.

This year we commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bloody conflicts continue to claim child victims in Syria, Palestine and elsewhere, in various regions affected by war and conflict. We must invest in their little bodies. We hope that children's hands will be used to build up, never to tear down. As has been said, we, as individuals and Governments, should prioritize humankind.

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

**Mr. Naeemi** (Afghanistan): Before delivering my brief statement, I would like to highlight a couple of points because we are cited in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509).

At the national level, in the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan, children are the primary victims. The Taliban and illegal armed groups use and target children in their operations. The Government of Afghanistan follows a zero-tolerance policy regarding the recruitment of children to its security forces. Sadly, we must report to the Chamber today that although more than 1 million children are eligible to go to school, they are unable to attend.

I would like to congratulate Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and for taking the initiative to convene this timely debate on the topic of children and armed

conflict. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report and commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and her capable team for their sustained efforts and commitment in supporting children in conflict-affected countries. I also thank the other briefers for their insightful remarks.

In the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan, children are the primary victims. As reported by the Secretary-General, in 2018 children constituted one-third of the 3,062 verified civilian casualties. In addition, 1,207 child casualties — 327 dead and 880 injured — were reported by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in the first half of 2019. Many victims of the recent suicide attacks in Kabul, Logar, Kandahar and Nangarhar were children. Although Government efforts focus on their protection, the Taliban and other illegal armed groups continue using and targeting children as part of their operations. They lure, brainwash and force them to partake in the conflict as soldiers and suicide-bombers.

The Afghan Government is fully committed to the protection of children in conflict and strongly condemns and opposes all forms of violations against children, including recruitment, killing and maiming, rape and other kinds of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools or hospitals and the denial of access to humanitarian assistance. To that end, the Government has taken concrete and decisive steps to address the situation and ensure the protection of our children.

With regard to recruitment, the Government follows a zero-tolerance policy on child recruitment in the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Strict regulations were established following the endorsement of the road map for the implementation of the joint action plan in 2014 and the new penal code of Afghanistan, which has been in force since 2018. The results of those efforts have been reflected in official reports from the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which indicate no recruits in 2018.

One thousand and nine underage children were also prevented from enlisting in the Afghan National Army, as well as 300 applicants in the Afghan national police forces, through the implementation of the age assessment guidelines for the prevention of child recruitment in the military forces and the establishment of child protection units at the police headquarters of all 34 provinces.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), in addition to taking stock of past achievements, it is fitting to reflect on how we can enhance efforts to address the six grave violations against children more effectively. In that regard, my Government is working in close cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations country-level task forces on monitoring and reporting to the United Nations country team to implement the action plan and delist the Afghanistan national and local police from the shame list, based on the noticeable progress made to end underage recruitment. We also continue to report on the implementation of the action plan, with the seventh annual report having been presented in April.

In conclusion, allow me once again to reiterate the commitment of my Government to continuing to protect our children from conflict, as well as our work with the United Nations in fully implementing the joint national action plan to prevent child recruitment.

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

**Mr. Denktaş** (Turkey): I wish to start by thanking your country's presidency, Madam, for organizing this very important open debate and the valuable and, in the case of Ms. Kamara, touching contributions by the briefers.

I will go straight to our point. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) paints a grim picture. The situation of children continues to be adversely and disproportionately affected by armed conflicts around the world. Daunting violations of the six defined categories — the six serious violations against children — continue to impose an immense impact on children. We are deeply troubled, particularly by the statistics provided for 2018. It is impossible to ignore the suffering and hopelessness in the eyes of Syrian, Palestinian, Rohingya and other children around the world. With regard to Syria, obviously, the crisis in that country has waged its highest toll on children. The statistics in the Secretary General's report, as well as images coming from Idlib, bear witness to the gravity of the situation.

In addition to the crimes of Al-Assad's brutal regime in the form of indiscriminate air strikes, barrel bombs, chemical weapons and artillery shelling, and the recently repeated deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure in Idlib, there

are other menaces facing children in Syria. Those include the well-documented crimes of the terrorist organization the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and its Syrian brand — the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ) — against young girls and boys over the years. We must make no mistake. The PYD and the YPG/YPJ employ the same tactics as other terrorist organizations operating in Syria, such as Da'esh, Al-Qaida, Al-Nusra and other affiliated groups. As such, they deserve no less condemnation than any of those groups.

The Secretary-General's latest report provides damning insights into the horrific treatment of children at the hands of the PKK in areas under its control. As highlighted in the report, the YPG/YPJ recruited the highest number of children in Syria last year. It also topped the list in the deprivation of children of their liberty. Our national estimates put the number of children kidnapped and forcefully separated from their families by the PKK at 700. The majority of them are either of Kurdish origin or from other groups, such as Arameans, as pointed out by the World Council of Arameans.

Intimidating dissidents, demographic engineering, forced conscription, the oppression of local populations and looting and the confiscation of property in areas under its de facto control are some of the other crimes committed by the PYD and the YPG/YPJ. They target schools, convert them into ammunition depots and deprive children of their fundamental right to education. Everyone will see, or must have seen, in the Secretary General's report that more than half the schools listed for military use in Syria are used by the YPG/YPJ. Those numbers speak for themselves. Other reports of the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs underline that the so-called Kurdish self-Administration in Syria banned Arabic in more than 250 schools. Approximately 60,000 students are prevented from attending school in the areas controlled by the YPG/YPJ.

While we appreciate the documentation of the PKK, PYD and YPG/YPJ crimes that are relevant to the subject matter of this open debate, we must stress the need to demonstrate a unified front against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We will not condone any act that could be exploited by terrorists in their search for recognition and legitimacy. That is why we condemned the signing of an action plan with a well-

known PKK terrorist, for whom INTERPOL issued a red notice.

Cherry-picking is simply not an option. The PYD-YPG/YPJ-PKK is a terrorist organization with the blood of more than 40,000 of my fellow citizens on its hands. It should be treated as such. Its existence and its actions cannot and should not be given any legitimization for any reason.

Furthermore, concerning some of the statements made earlier today, I should underline that we do not accept and cannot remain idle with regard to a terrorist organization being praised for committing to limit its level of criminality. That approach and the method of strategic communication need to be urgently reconsidered.

My Government fully shares and supports the agenda of the United Nations in addressing the situation of children in armed conflict. To that end, we show the utmost care and take all the precautions required under international humanitarian law. We will continue to work closely and in complete transparency with the Special Representative's Office in support of her efforts and to make sure all the information they collect is correct and complete. We also do everything within our means to alleviate the suffering of children running from armed conflict.

Of the 2.6 million Syrians that fled to Turkey for obvious reasons, 1.7 million are children under the age of 18. More than 444,000 Syrian babies have been born in Turkey since the conflict began eight years ago. We have mobilized our resources to provide proper and dignified living conditions for Syrian children who are under temporary protection in Turkey, from education — as it is important given the fact that they will be the ones to eventually rebuild their own country — to free health care.

The best way of keeping children from harm's way is prevention in the first place. With that understanding, we will also continue to support the Secretary-General's focus on prevention and the protection of children. We commend the Polish presidency for convening this important open debate, and the Secretary-General for his report. My country will continue to do everything it can to prevent and end all violations against children.

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

**Mr. Al-Maawda** (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, and your friendly country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I thank you for holding this important meeting.

I would also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her valuable briefing. I further thank all the briefers, who have enriched this debate with their valuable expertise and perspective on this sensitive humanitarian issue.

We associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Preventing violence against children in armed conflict is extremely important for the international community. It is the central pillar of building and maintaining peace, as well as respecting human rights and international law. We must therefore protect and guarantee the rights of children and provide them with what they need for their upbringing so that they can contribute to building stable and prosperous communities in the future.

However, the picture painted by the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) on the situation of children and armed conflict is cause for concern and regret. It is a serious humanitarian challenge. We must address this matter in the light of the gravity of the situation and its implications for international peace and security. The report highlights the severity and frequency of harm inflicted through grave abuses perpetrated against children as fighting continues among conflicting parties all over the world. This constitutes a blatant violation of international law.

We commend all efforts to report those violations and to hold the perpetrators accountable. The responsible parties should be identified in the Secretary-General's annual reports. We believe that accountability is critical to ensuring justice for the victims, enforcing international law and putting an end to the commission of such crimes, which humankind has rejected. In that respect, we join other countries in calling for an accurate list of perpetrators of violations to be included in future annual reports, which in turn must be based on impartial, factual and evidence-based information.

We believe in the importance of protecting the right to education. This is no less a right during armed

conflict. We therefore make great efforts to guarantee education for children in emergencies, especially those in situations of armed conflict, as demonstrated by the initiatives and programmes backed by the Qatar Foundation, first and foremost, in cooperation with international organizations. The Foundation has provided quality education to millions of children around the world. Given the gravity of risks and challenges children face in armed conflict and the fact that they are deprived of the most basic means of subsistence, including the right to education — as reaffirmed in reports issued by the United Nations, international organizations and right-based organizations — we call on States parties to conflicts to refrain from targeting schools and universities and to avoid using educational institutions for military purposes. We also take this opportunity to urge Member States to join the Safe Schools Declaration, to which the State of Qatar has acceded, alongside 94 other Member States.

We reaffirm the need to consider children linked to armed groups first and foremost as victims. Countries must provide them with programmes for their long-term integration. In that regard, we commend the important role played by the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, established and co-chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. The Coalition is helping to return children to their families and to make sure that they are given back their childhood and provided with a suitable environment for their upbringing.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is carrying out the important role of protecting children and reintegrating them into their communities. In that connection, we commend the proactive efforts of the Special Representative in working with national and regional actors to create initiatives to prevent grave violations from being committed against children affected by armed conflict.

The State of Qatar believes in the importance of strengthening human rights and protecting children. We will therefore spare no effort in supporting the Office of the Special Representative and enabling it to fully implement its mandate. I am pleased to inform the Council that in September 2018, the State of Qatar signed a partnership agreement with the Office of the Special Representative, which includes funding the New York Office and the establishment of a centre for

children and armed conflict in Doha. The centre will be active in preparing research, analysis and evaluation, and will hold workshops, spread awareness and build capacities on issues related to the protection of children in armed conflict. We look forward to the launch of the centre before the end of the year so that it can begin its humanitarian work.

In conclusion, I reiterate the commitment of the State of Qatar to protecting human rights. We will continue to support international efforts to protect children in armed conflict, to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law and to prevent the commission of violations against children.

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

**Mr. Aidid** (Malaysia): At the outset, Malaysia wishes to align itself with the statement delivered by Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

My delegation wishes to congratulate Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and on convening this open debate. We would also like to thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba for her remarks this morning and for presenting, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the annual report (S/2019/509) on children and armed conflict.

We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, for her valuable insights. My delegation thanks Mr. Majok Peter Awan, from South Sudan, for sharing his experiences as a former child soldier and for his testimony on the effects of child abduction.

Malaysia shares the deep concern expressed by the Secretary-General on the scale and severity of the grave violations committed against children in 2018. These continued violations against children shock our collective conscience, which demands a concerted and collective response. A vital component of a comprehensive approach to child protection is accountability. In that respect, Malaysia urges that affirmative action be taken under national or international justice mechanisms, where appropriate, against parties that commit violations and abuses against children. That has become more relevant this year as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009).

The Security Council has developed various tools to ensure the accountability and compliance of conflicting parties, including through the listing mechanism contained in the annual report. Malaysia wishes to reiterate the importance of integrity and impartiality in the listing of all perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights. We believe that facts should be the determining factor that guides our actions under this mechanism.

Malaysia supports the call of the Secretary-General on Member States to allow safe, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and the protection of humanitarian personnel and assets, in line with resolution 2417 (2018). Believing that the United Nations would gain by it, Malaysia would suggest that the Organization develop practical guidance for data collection on the denial of humanitarian access. Such an effort would help to standardize and support the work of country task forces on monitoring and reporting of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Further, Malaysia believes that United Nations peace operations and political missions should maintain dedicated child-protection capacity to ensure that child-protection concerns are prioritized even in the context of the downsizing, consolidation or transition of such operations.

With regard to reintegration, Malaysia believes that the process of reintegration is a long-term effort that requires the shared responsibility of all stakeholders. In this regard, we call on Member States, United Nations entities and other parties concerned to integrate child-protection provisions in the community-based reintegration programmes that foster a spirit of unity and reconciliation among communities ravaged by war.

To further support the children and armed conflict agenda, my delegation encourages all Member States to consider endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, which would deter the military use of educational facilities in armed conflict and preserve schools as mainstays of learning, in line with the Vancouver Principles that further operationalize child protection within United Nations peacekeeping, with a focus on preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Malaysia reaffirms its commitments to ensuring that children around the world affected by armed conflict are given the greatest consideration and attention, which is what they truly deserve.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of Palestine..

**Ms. Rasheed** (Palestine): At the outset, I wish to congratulate Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and acknowledge its able leadership. I also wish to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs for convening today's important debate on children and armed conflict. This matter continues to be of the highest priority and urgency for the State of Palestine.

We would also like to thank the Secretary-General Guterres for his report (S/2019/509). We are grateful to the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their important briefings to the Council and their tireless advocacy for the protection and well-being of children. Their efforts and those of all relevant international civil servants and civil society to this end deserve our full support.

The Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict reflects in painful detail how children in situations of armed conflict continue to be subjected to the most appalling violations of their human rights. We regret the fact that 2018 was marked by the highest recorded number of children killed or maimed in armed conflict since the United Nations began monitoring and reporting this grave violation. The numbers are shocking and beyond unacceptable.

Collectively we must do more. As this month marks ten years since resolution 1882 (2009) and as we approach the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international community must mobilize to resolve the conflicts and remedy the situations that continue to cause child casualties. We must act in ways that are consistent with the principles and commitments affirmed in this important resolution and in line with our collective obligations under international law.

Such action cannot exclude efforts to address the continuing plight of Palestinian children. Denied their inalienable rights, the Palestinian people in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, have endured over a half-century of foreign occupation, with generations of children suffering grave breaches and human rights violations, as Israel, the occupying Power, persists with absolute impunity in its systematic perpetration of violations, including those considered among the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. This situation has been repeatedly attested to by United

Nations agencies and international human rights organizations. Yet, despite constant appeals and calls for protection, Palestinian children have been left unprotected, defenceless and vulnerable.

In the reporting period, the United Nations verified the highest number of Palestinian children killed by Israeli occupying forces and settlers since the 2014 war on the Gaza Strip. This number includes babies as young as 18 months old. Moreover, over 2,700 Palestinian children were injured in 2018, including many permanently maimed and disabled, and the number of casualties has continued to rise in 2019, including as a result of intentional targeting of peaceful protesters by the occupying forces. Settler violence and terror also continues to severely impact Palestinian children, including harassment and attacks on schoolchildren, all under the watch of the Israeli occupying forces and in grave breach of Israel's obligations as the occupying Power.

Palestinian children, some as young as 12 years old, also continue to be arrested, brutally interrogated, detained and imprisoned by Israel, with several held under administrative detention for months and some for up to a year without charge. Since 2000, at least 10,000 Palestinian children have been arrested and prosecuted in an Israeli military detention system notorious for its systematic ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian children. Reports document that three out of four children experience physical violence during arrest, transfer or interrogation, with physical and psychological trauma that can only haunt them for the rest of their lives. Perhaps that is exactly the point of such policies by the occupying Power, as it attempts to damage and impair one generation after another with its unlawful, unethical and immoral policies and practices.

Israel's illegal and depraved colonization of the Palestinian land and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people also continue to gravely impact our children. Its systematic and punitive demolition of homes has rendered thousands homeless and forcibly displaced hundreds of children and their families, among them Palestine refugees living the trauma of dispossession and displacement once again. Thousands more children and their families remain at risk of losing their homes and life belongings, deepening their fear, anxieties and hopelessness.

Israeli raids and attacks on schools and closures of Palestinian educational institutions also continue.

Moreover, humanitarian assistance to address protection needs continues to be impeded as a result of access and movement restrictions and other collective-punishment measures imposed by the occupation, most severely via its inhumane illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, now in its thirteenth year and the cause of immense deprivation, suffering and isolation of Palestinian children.

The foregoing is just a snapshot of the massive violations that continue to be perpetrated against Palestinian children by this belligerent, illegal occupation. There must be accountability for all these crimes.

The State of Palestine reiterates that, according to the established criteria and the thorough documentation available to the Security Council, including as reflected in its own consecutive reports, the perpetration of such violations and crimes warrants that Israel, its army and its settlers be put on the list of parties that commit grave violations against children. The absence of such inclusion continues to undermine the credibility of this list, exposing it to the criticism of politicization, and continues to be a missed opportunity to hold Israel accountable and to save the lives of Palestinian children. Moreover, we call on the Special Representative to ensure that the report's section on Israel and the State of Palestine be placed in the prevailing context of military occupation, in order to ensure an accurate examination of the situation of our children, including ensuring that measures constituting collective punishment, in particular the Israeli blockade of Gaza, are not omitted in enumeration of the long list of violations against the children of Palestine.

We will remain vigilant in calling upon the international community to uphold its obligations in that regard. We appeal to the Security Council and all States to shore up the political will and courage to act immediately and without selectivity to protect the lives of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation. This protection is essential for safeguarding their rights and promoting their well-being until an end is brought to this illegal occupation and the rights, freedoms, security and dignity of the Palestinian people are realized, beginning with our children.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Sierra Leone.

**Mrs. Sulimani** (Sierra Leone): I wish to thank you, Madam President, for your initiative in convening this open debate of the Security Council on children and

armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/509). At the same time, my delegation is saddened by the report's findings on the extent to which in 2018, children in more than 20 countries around the world suffered as a result of conflict and related violence.

I am honoured to participate in this debate from the perspective of Sierra Leone and its experience of the horrendous impact of a prolonged — 11-year, to be exact — armed conflict on our children.

This morning the Security Council heard from Ms. Mariatu Kamara, an innocent victim of that bitter and senseless rebel war. Her appearance and contribution here today could be described as a chapter in the record of atrocities perpetrated against innocent civilians, including children.

Coincidentally, three weeks ago marked the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the historic Lomé Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front. At the signing ceremony, the late President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah brought a young child named Memunatu, lifted her high up and dedicated the Agreement to the children of Sierra Leone. This underlines the importance of peace and reconciliation as a prerequisite for addressing the needs of children in armed conflict.

Thankfully, that sad chapter in my country's history was closed some 17 years ago. Given our experience with conflict and its horrendous impact on children, we were quick to appreciate our responsibility to protect our children and to come to the realization that sustainable development cannot be achieved in post-conflict settings if prompt action is not taken to prevent such heinous crimes.

As we commemorate the tenth anniversary of resolution 1882 (2009), we would like to share some of our experiences on this issue, including the challenges we had to surmount to ensure that our traumatized children could enjoy their inalienable right to live in a peaceful, congenial environment, their right to education and to adequate food and shelter, as well as their right to be heard and be protected from all forms of violence and abuse, be it in time of war or in time of peace.

On the measures taken to prevent, reintegrate and stop the cycles of violence, the Government of Sierra Leone, in its bid to end the hostilities, signed the

forementioned Lomé Peace Agreement, which laid out a path to peace and provided for the protection of children affected by the conflict. Disarmament, demobilization and the reintegration of all ex-combatants, including all children associated with the war, into their communities through a National Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programme soon followed. To combat impunity and enhance transitional justice, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to look into, among other things, allegations of sexual violence.

Additionally, a hybrid international court, the Special Court for Sierra Leone, was established to bring to book all those who bore the greatest responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations. The Special Court rendered the first conviction by an international tribunal for the recruitment and use of child soldiers in armed conflict, and the Court's landmark decision on sexual slavery and forced marriage was an acknowledgement of the proscribed conduct as new crimes in international criminal jurisprudence.

On social reintegration, we enacted an Education Act that led to the reform of the education sector and are currently implementing a policy of free quality education for all children in Government and Government-assisted primary and secondary schools nationwide.

As we seek ways to improve efforts to protect and support children in armed conflict, we should note that the ongoing reforms at the United Nations, including budget cuts to peacekeeping and efforts to incorporate protection mandates, threaten the Organization's ability to deliver on the Security Council's children and armed conflict mandate, particularly as a result of diminished child-protection capacity in peacekeeping missions as a result of those budget cuts.

As we commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November this year, my delegation wishes to remind and urge Member States to treat children associated with armed conflict as victims entitled to the full protection of their rights, and, where they may have allegedly committed illegal acts, to treat them in accordance with juvenile justice standards as prescribed by international law.

Sierra Leone believes that Member States and the Security Council can do better by strengthening

accountability for perpetrators and holding them accountable for child-rights violations, including those who attack schools and hospitals, deny humanitarian access and perpetrate sexual violence against children in situations of armed conflict.

We further believe that Member States can also better support actions by the United Nations in support of child victims and survivors by providing adequate and predictable funding for reintegration programmes in order to enable such victims and survivors, as well as children recruited and used by parties to conflict, to benefit from the support necessary to resume their lives and to be smoothly reintegrated into their respective communities. While we agree that children can become positive agents of change, those affected by conflict should access the reintegration programmes required to recover their lives in order to enable them to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sierra Leone cannot choose to remain silent simply because the war ended in my country 17 years ago. Here we wish to pay tribute to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and the many dedicated child-protection activists around the world for their support through the mobilization of international cooperation and the provision of financial resources to enhance national efforts to protect children affected by war. We stand ready to share our views on this issue whenever the need arises.

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

**Mrs. Pejanović Đurišić (Montenegro):** At the outset, let me thank the Polish presidency for having organized an open debate on this important issue of children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank today's briefers for their valuable presentations and essential work in protecting children in conflict situations.

Although Montenegro fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, I would like to make some remarks in my national capacity.

Once again the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509) has shown that millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders but constitute an alarming percentage of the overall number of the casualties of war. Children continue

to face an unacceptable risk of recruitment and use, killing and maiming, all forms of sexual violence and abduction, and they continue to suffer as the result of attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access.

The annual report highlights the devastating impact of new conflict dynamics and operational tactics, combined with widespread disregard for international law, on children, in 2018. There were more than 24,000 verified grave violations that year, the highest number of verified cases of the killing and maiming of children since the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We condemn in the strongest terms the continued violations against children and urge all parties to conflict to respect international humanitarian law and related laws and practices, refrain from attacking schools and hospitals, and protect those most vulnerable, particularly children.

Despite the increasing level of grave violations committed against children, certain improvements in the situation of children affected by armed conflict have been made in the past year. We have witnessed the tireless efforts of the relevant stakeholders, particularly United Nations staff and civil-society partners, including child-protection advisers, to ensure the release and support the integration of more than 10,000 children. We strongly support these efforts, as the prevention of violence against children, the release of child soldiers and their reintegration represent crucial elements in ensuring children's well-being and the prevention of future conflicts. In that regard, we welcome the establishment of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers.

This year we will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and next year the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of its two Optional Protocols, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It is a crucial time to centre our efforts around ensuring the universal ratification of those instruments, particularly the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Therefore, we encourage States to strengthen the legal foundation on children and armed conflict by ratifying the Optional Protocol.

Apart from ratifying treaties that lay the foundation for the safeguard of children's rights and their protection from all forms of violence, Montenegro is one of the

pathfinding countries of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. In addition, we endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. As peace operations plays crucial role in sustaining peace and preventing human rights violations, in particular against children, international child protection provisions, including the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, as well as child protection capacities, should be incorporated in peacekeeping mandates.

Conflict escalations also cause significant disruptions to children's education and health care, as education and health-care facilities are often partially or completely destroyed. We believe it is crucial to ensure that children continue to have access to education, which is an indispensable aspect of children's socialization and reintegration. Child protection issues should feature in the overall peace process, while the perpetrators of violations against children must be held accountable. In that regard, we encourage further national and international efforts in bringing the culture of impunity to an end.

As we mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), we must redouble our efforts at all levels in order to effectively protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation and ensure that their human rights are well respected. Only by doing so will we ensure the well-being of entire generations, thereby building stable and peaceful societies for the future.

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

**Mr. Margaryan (Armenia):** Armenia would like to thank the Polish presidency for organizing today's open debate. The participation of His Excellency Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz earlier in today's meeting demonstrates the high relevance and importance of this humanitarian and human rights issue. We also thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and the other briefers for outlining the complexity of the challenges related to the protection of children in armed conflict.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509) reveals the disturbing increase in violence against children. The

focus areas of the report, such as the recruitment and use of children, abductions, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals are a stark reminder of the gravity of the situation and the urgent need to address it. Children living in conflict areas are particularly vulnerable due to the lack of humanitarian access. Attempts to isolate people living in conflict areas from the outer world and denying their inalienable human rights should be identified and effectively addressed.

We support the efforts of the Special Representative to create synergies among the United Nations agencies, regional organizations and international human rights bodies. The mandate of the Special Representative provides for a key role in streamlining and integrating the activities of the international community around the noble goal of protecting children.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, one of the most widely endorsed and fundamental treaties for the protection and promotion of universal human rights. Armenia continues to prioritize the protection of children's rights, as reflected in our national policies as well as in the framework of our international cooperation.

We work closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross in creating shelters and safe rooms in schools and kindergartens, located in the border regions, and also undertake steps to ensure the safety of schools in line with Armenia's commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration. Armenia's endorsement of the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Paris Commitments and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers is yet another reflection of our commitment to promote the safety of children. We are also a signatory to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and we encourage Member States that have not yet done so to join those important instruments.

Regrettably, in our region too we have witnessed violence against children in conflict situations. The deliberate, indiscriminate targeting by Azerbaijan of the civilian population and infrastructures of Nagorno Karabakh and the bordering regions of Armenia, including schools, kindergartens and hospitals, has resulted in deaths and injuries among civilians and schoolchildren.

Refusing the creation of an investigative mechanism to identify the ceasefire violations, as agreed within the framework of the internationally mandated format of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group co-chairmanship, which would contribute to reducing the number of incidents affecting civilians, including children, is beyond any reasonable justification.

We have been observing an appalling practice of involving children in State-led hate propaganda, including through school curricula, in our neighbouring country. Such a malicious practice of negative stereotyping, fuelling hatred on the basis of national identity among children and young people, is not only reprehensible and incompatible with the international humanitarian and human rights law, but it further undermines efforts to create an environment conducive to peace and reconciliation.

The effective protection of children in situations of armed conflict requires strengthened commitment to the implementation of the relevant international instruments and necessitates early warning and early action. Supporting free and unimpeded humanitarian access is crucial to preventing and alleviating the suffering of children caught in conflict. Today's open debate once again reminds us that the imperative of protecting children and ensuring their right to life should prevail over political manipulations and distorted narratives.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

**Mr. Moncada** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Armed conflicts are one of the basest acts of the human condition. Their extreme brutality and degradation affect first and foremost the innocent who do not carry weapons, that is to say, the civilian population, who are victims of the cruelty of war. It is therefore inevitably the elderly, women and children, innocent social groups in conflicts, who suffer the most from violence. Armed conflicts are among the worst tragedies that can befall a nation and any act used as a justification for the narrative of violence must be denounced and condemned.

Today we have come to demand that the Security Council act immediately to prevent the disaster of imminent military action against Venezuela, already announced by one of its permanent members, the Government of the United States, in complete violation

of its responsibilities within the Council and of its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

On other occasions, we have denounced before the Council, members of the most important organ in the world, who are responsible for maintaining international peace and security, the plan systematically implemented by President Trump's Government to suffocate our nation's economy with its coercive measures, which are in violation of the United Nations Charter and the human rights of our people by serving as a collective punishment against the civilian population, particularly the most vulnerable sectors, such as the elderly, women and children.

We also denounce how extortion measures have the effect of stealing and plundering our national wealth by illegally appropriating refineries, gold currency and other financial instruments, amounting to more than \$30 billion, which are essential for meeting the basic needs of our people.

The economic blockade and colossal robbery bear the hallmarks of monstrous cruelty, unique to war crimes, by criminalizing the purchase of basic foodstuffs for the sustenance of more than 6 million families receiving vital assistance through special programmes run by our Government. We are here today to denounce the United States Government for trying to fabricate a famine in Venezuela to appropriate our natural resources and recolonize our nation. That is a crime against humanity.

Economic terrorism was compounded by political aggression and the violation of Venezuelan sovereignty on the border with Colombia on 23 February. A coup d'état was also funded and organized on 30 April, but it was thwarted by the swift action of Venezuelan State institutions. The clandestine operations of political aggression — subsequently shamelessly acknowledged by officials of the Trump Government — have failed, but their arrogance does not allow them to admit their mistakes.

Desperation makes for a poor adviser. President Trump, beleaguered by all the internal accusations against his Government, is awakening the demons of racism, internal conflict and international war. It is a flight forward, and we are now entering an even more dangerous phase that involves the militarization of politics towards Venezuela, with a plan that seeks an excuse for invasion in the very short term. The United

States Southern Command, Mr. Trump's branch of the armed forces in South America and the Caribbean, has this year conducted more than 55 spy plane incursions into Venezuela's flight information region, without prior warning or without providing a reason, thereby endangering air safety in the region. Overflights have occurred daily over the past two weeks, thereby increasing in frequency and accompanied by provocative and threatening statements about the ability of the United States to immediately attack Venezuela, if ordered to do so by President Trump. A reciprocal military assistance treaty among countries of the region, which has never been applied in the past 70 years and which Venezuela denounced six years ago, is now being invoked as a legal excuse for invasion.

We are also here to denounce the fact that President Trump yesterday announced to the media that he is considering imposing a naval blockade and quarantine against Venezuela. According to Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, such measures involve the use of armed force, which, due to their gravity and devastating effects on civilians, can be applied only with the authorization of the Security Council, in cases of threat to the peace, breach of the peace or acts of aggression. We therefore ask, when did the Council approve such force? When did the Council determine that Venezuela is a threat to the peace, or that it breached the peace, or that it committed acts of aggression? It is clear that none of the assumptions for such serious action exists and that none of the legal requirements has been met. Every threat and action by the United States against Venezuela is illegal and criminal and could lead to disaster for the civilian population.

President Trump's threats and aggression are in line with the comments made here in the Chamber by the representative of the United States a few days ago. According to the official, international law and Security Council resolutions, which are binding on all States and are part of international law, are not references for the decisions of the United States.

The world that President Trump offers is a world without the rule of law; where children, women and the elderly are the primary victims of the calamities of war; and where humankind lives in constant fear of the abuses of an unpredictable Government, guided by a supremacist ideology that offers only hatred and violence. It is a world without the United Nations. Therefore, we can conclude only that Government

of President Trump is a threat to international peace and security.

We in Venezuela reject the nightmare of perpetual war proposed by Mr. Trump. We urgently demand that the Security Council enforce the United Nations Charter, uphold international law, maintain peace, halt the imminent disaster of a world Power that behaves like an outlaw State and, using its authority, stop Trump's war. In sum, we ask that Trump's war be stopped.

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

**Mr. Seifi Pargou** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing today's open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/509) and the briefers for their input.

Armed conflicts have serious irreparable impacts on children. Protecting them from the scourge of conflict is not an option; it is an obligation. Saving children means saving the future, future generations and their peace and prosperity. However, the question is one of how that noble objective can be achieved. There are different ways to fulfil it. However, none of them can be as effective as putting an end to current conflicts and preventing their re-emergence, as well as the emergence of new conflicts.

For example, so long as the occupation of Palestine continues, each and every year more and more children will be killed, injured, arrested and detained by Israeli forces. As reflected in the Secretary-General's report, some of the Palestinian children killed by Israel were as young as 18 months old. Similarly, most of them were shot by live ammunition to the upper body, while reportedly posing no imminent threat to Israeli forces. The deliberate mass killing and injuring of Palestinian children by Israel is, no doubt, a clear manifestation of war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, despite that fact, Israeli forces have never been blacklisted in the reports of the Secretary-General, which seriously undermines their accuracy, credibility and impartiality. The sense of impunity has only emboldened Israel to kill more children, with more brutality.

A similar pattern of double standards is evident when the report considers the situation of children in Yemen, where most of the child casualties were attributed to air strikes by the coalition. But, in reality, there is no coalition. It is only Saudi Arabia that continues killing Yemeni children. It proves that deleting Saudi Arabia

from the top of the list of violators of the rights of children in the Secretary-General's report has resulted only in the killing of more Yemeni children by Saudis. Is it not time to end that approach? A glance at the practices of the Israelis, the Saudis and Da'esh forces in Syria and Iraq reveals that there is a real race taking place among the child killers as to who can kill more children. We strongly condemn all such inhumane acts, which are gross violations of international law.

At a time when the situation of children in armed conflict is alarming, we need to redouble our efforts to prevent the trend and all violations of children's rights. That is a common responsibility that should be pursued responsibly by all. Together, we can and need to save the lives of our children in armed conflicts and, thereby, contribute to peace in our time and prosperity for generations to come.

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

**Ms. Ferreira** (Angola): Allow me, at the outset, to join my colleagues in congratulating you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and wishing you a successful and productive term. Allow me also to commend you for holding this important and timely open debate on such a critical issue, as well as to thank the briefers for the very important information they provided.

The problem of children in armed conflict is very close to our hearts. Eliminating the inhumane treatment of children trapped in armed conflict is of paramount importance and something we can all agree on, no matter our policy positions or how entrenched our disagreements might be. Although steady progress in reducing the number of child soldiers in the world has been achieved through the development of a monitoring and reporting system, an increase in the implementation of action plans and refocusing on the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, resulting in a safer world for children, several challenges still exist.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/509) is a stark reminder of how the challenges posed by the evolving nature of ongoing armed conflict — through the deliberate targeting and military use of schools, the indoctrination of children to commit crimes, using them to carry explosive devices and their abduction, sexual abuse, forced recruitment,

rape and deliberate maiming and killing — aggravate the violence and abuse committed by extremists. Excellent work has been done to address this matter, with effective cooperation among the United Nations, States and non-State actors, but parties to conflict and the international community must do more to protect children and young people affected by armed conflict.

As such, we must prevent conflicts from breaking out in the first place by increasing efforts aimed at conflict prevention; ensuring that children associated with armed groups are reintegrated, not punished, and provided with quality education and health-care services; including young people in conflict resolution, sustaining peace and development processes; and stopping all forms of violence against children. We must assist Governments listed in the annexes to the report to adopt and implement the action plans suggested by the Council.

On a positive note, we would like to underline the progress made by the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and the commitments of the Governments involved. We also encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF and others to continue implementing their agenda on children and their engagement with non-State armed groups, which often results in the surrender of child soldiers who belong to armed groups and gives them opportunities for a second life.

Angola remains committed to strengthening the protection and empowerment of children affected on the ground. We support the Secretary-General's recommendations in his report in that regard, while calling on the Security Council to reinforce its actions and recognize the valuable contribution that regional and subregional organizations and arrangements make to ensuring the protection of children affected by armed conflict

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

**Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan):** At the outset, I would like to congratulate Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and commend its initiative to convene today's important open debate on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank today's briefers for the insightful information they shared with us.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as to the 1949 Geneva Conventions relative to the protection of war victims. My Government has strongly and consistently supported international efforts aimed at ensuring more effective protection for the rights of children and improving the situation of children affected by armed conflict.

Despite some progress made at the international, regional and national levels in preventing and responding to grave violations committed against children, serious challenges remain. According to the report of the Secretary-General,

“[v]erified cases of the killing and maiming of children reached record levels globally since the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005)”. (*S/2019/509, para. 6*)

Effective protection efforts must be free of selectivity and address all situations of armed conflict without distinction, including those of a protracted nature and having a prolonged impact on civilians and children in particular. The wrongs of the recent past, including attacks on schools and hospitals, the killing and maiming of children, forced displacements and the abduction of children, must not be neglected.

During the continued aggression by the Republic of Armenia against my country, serious violations of international humanitarian law have been committed, amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide. A scorched-earth policy implemented by the Armenian side has involved the ethnic cleansing of the seized territories of all Azerbaijanis and the brutal killing and wounding of thousands of civilians, including children. Over more than 30 years, Azerbaijan has hosted one of the highest numbers of refugees and displaced persons in the world, many of whom are children.

In February 1992, the largest massacre during the conflict was committed against the civilians of the town of Khojaly in the Nagorno Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan. As a result of the attack and capture of the town by the Armenian armed forces, hundreds of Azerbaijanis, including women, children and the elderly, were killed, wounded or taken hostage, while the town was razed to the ground.

As a result of the war waged against my country, 3,888 citizens of Azerbaijan were registered missing, including 718 civilians, of whom 71 are children. Those reported missing disappeared in circumstances that raise serious concern as to their well-being, particularly given the atrocious methods of warfare widely practiced by the Armenian side during the conflict. Yerevan refuses to account for the missing persons within its control, as well as to conduct a prompt and effective investigation into their fate.

Despite the formal ceasefire, the Armenian armed forces have repeatedly targeted civilians and civilian objects in Azerbaijan situated along or further behind the frontline. Therefore, as a result of the heavy shelling in April 2016, many schools in the Goranboy, Tartar, Aghdam and Agjabadi districts of Azerbaijan were damaged. That was verified in the assessment report of 15 May 2016 released by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees following its mission to the affected areas of my country.

Under international law, intentionally directing attacks on buildings dedicated to education is a war crime. It should also be noted that attacks on schools and hospitals constitute one of the grave violations that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is mandated to monitor and report on.

In conclusion, I would like to say that, in order to break the cycles of violence and aid prevention efforts, respect for international humanitarian law is imperative and impunity must end. Being an inevitable consequence of the offences committed, accountability is an important prerequisite on the path leading to peace and long-lasting reconciliation.

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

**Mr. Amde** (Ethiopia): Let me begin by congratulating Poland on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council. We also extend our appreciation to Foreign Minister Czaputowicz for presiding over the debate earlier today, and thank Poland for having convened this important debate as the first order of business during its presidency. We also wish to express our appreciation to Belgium for its commitment as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for

Children and Armed Conflict, for her presentation, and we thank all the briefers.

It is encouraging to hear that close to 14,000 children have been released from different forms of captivity and reintegrated into society worldwide. However, it is disappointing to learn from in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) about the disturbing levels of serious violations — 24,000 violations against children in armed conflict in just one year is distressing. That is, I believe, more than the size of the population of many towns around the world.

We are seriously concerned about the continued impact of armed conflict on children, causing their forced displacement and giving rise to serious protection challenges. The activities of terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, including recruiting and abducting children to use in asymmetric warfare and, worse still, deploying them as suicide bombers, continue unabated. Their violent acts mean that the sisterly countries of Somalia and Nigeria remain among the most affected in terms of the recruitment and use of children for crime. That situation continues to pose real protection challenges for United Nations peacekeeping missions, as well as African-led peace support operations. In that context, I would like to underscore that Ethiopia attaches great importance to the protection of civilians, including the protection of children in armed conflict. The Government of Ethiopia is committed to the full implementation of obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We are also committed to the full implementation of resolution 1379 (2001) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict.

As a major troop-contributing country to United Nations peace operations and African Union-led peace support operations, Ethiopia places great emphasis on deploying troops who have been adequately trained, vetted, equipped and instructed. We ensure that our peacekeepers in various operations, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Ethiopian peacekeepers fully understand that disciplinary and judiciary powers will be exercised over them in the case of any violation. They operate within and abide by the broader principles of international humanitarian law and the principles of distinction and proportionality in all their operations.

Let me re-emphasize that our troops are guided by the rules of engagement elaborated within the framework of our obligations under international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols I and II. We have also put in place a mechanism to ensure accountability in order to address any violations by troops deployed to any mission. Such a framework has, over the years, enabled us to properly and effectively address any protection challenges. I also wish to add that, as one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, Ethiopia continues to provide international protection to refugee children, including unaccompanied minors who have been forcibly displaced as a result of grave violations by parties to armed conflicts.

Ethiopia is also ready to take corrective measures and learn from shortfalls by conducting in-depth investigations of any allegations against its forces serving in peacekeeping missions and to take action where appropriate. However, it is important that alleged incidents involving any peacekeepers be substantiated by complete investigations. Similar allegations have been investigated by AMISOM in the past, and the investigators concluded that,

“There are reasonable grounds to doubt that the alleged incidents took place unless any additional and convincing evidence comes forward”.

Conclusions like that strongly underline the need to base investigations on concrete evidence and for relevant United Nations agencies to work closely with peacekeeping missions and the troop-contributing countries concerned before publishing allegations. We strongly believe that such investigations must be consistent with the objectivity, accuracy and reliability criteria established by resolution 1612 (2005).

It is our conviction that children must be protected from indiscriminate attacks as well as the impact of crossfire incidents during fighting in densely populated rural areas and urban centres. In that regard, Ethiopia subscribes without any exception to the principle of primary consideration for the protection of children and their interests. We take the importance of children’s right to protection very seriously. Criminalizing the recruitment and use of children is part of our national legal system as well as our African conventions, not to mention our international obligations. We give utmost priority to providing support and treatment to victims of incidents, and we are entirely opposed to any impunity.

I note that we have made some positive gains in our region. The signing in September 2018 of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan has had a considerable impact. The subsequent decrease in hostilities is contributing to improved humanitarian access, particularly to children and women. It is in that context that we would like to encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to explore mechanisms to further strengthen the cooperation of her Office with the African Union Peace and Security Council, including consultative meetings aimed at ensuring the full implementation of plans of action signed with parties to an armed conflict.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our support for the Secretary-General’s call on Member States to ensure that mitigation measures are put in place to prevent the six grave violations reported. We also support all measures that strengthen the accountability of perpetrators of crimes against children. I reaffirm Ethiopia’s fullest commitment to continuing its work with relevant actors, both here in the United Nations and in the African Union, in order to extend and streamline the protection of children in armed conflict.

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

**Mr. Alrowaiei** (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we should like to thank His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, and the entire Polish delegation for having organized this very important debate on children and armed conflict in the light of the increasing threats they face throughout the world. We also wish to thank all of today’s briefers for their enlightening briefings.

This year, we are commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999) — a resolution that we voted in favour of during our membership of the Council and that places the issue of children and armed conflict at the heart of the Council’s agenda. Conflicts persist in a number of regions around the world, with appalling crimes being committed by militias and terrorist groups. Children are the first victims of crime in times of conflict. They are recruited, exploited, kidnapped and trafficked; they suffer sexual violence and are killed and maimed. They also suffer the indirect effects of war. They are robbed of their fundamental rights, depriving them of a decent life in peace and security, without education, food or

health care. Based on the conviction that it is essential to protect children, in 1992 the Kingdom of Bahrain acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

The coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen also attaches special importance to promoting the protection of children, as evidenced by the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the coalition and the United Nations that provides the legislative framework for establishing a plan of action to strengthen the protection of children in Yemen, in cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In that context, we condemn the violations committed against children and their recruitment by Iran-backed Houthi militias.

The violence that children witness in areas of armed conflict and unrest — often involving losing family members and loved ones — has permanent psychological effects. We must address this issue in order to avoid losing an entire generation to warfare, particularly with regard to children living in those countries most affected by war and conflict. We should focus on developing national, regional and international action plans aimed at preventing these violations before they take place, in line with resolution 2427 (2018). In the event that such violations do occur, it is vital that we ensure the rehabilitation of children and their reintegration into society.

In conclusion, we underscore the important role that the international community should play in combating all inhuman practices carried out against children and in effectively responding to all matters that threaten international peace and security, in full compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in order to provide effective protection to children and guarantee their legitimate rights.

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

**Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh): Let me begin by congratulating Poland on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and on having organized this open debate on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, His

Excellency Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, for presiding over this important meeting. I would also like to thank Peru for its effective presidency in the month of July.

I take this opportunity to welcome the new Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Ambassador Zhang Jun.

Please also allow me to express my sincere thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for presenting the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2019/509). I also wish to express my appreciation to Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; Ms. Mariatu Kamara, UNICEF Canada Ambassador; and Mr. Majok Peter Awan, a former child soldier, for their detailed briefings this morning.

My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his annual report, which covers the period from January to December 2018, and for providing information on the six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, such as their recruitment and use; killing and maiming; abductions; rape and other forms of sexual violence; attacks on schools and hospitals; and the denial of humanitarian access.

We are appalled to see the rise in violations against children, with more than 24,000 grave violations against children documented in 20 country situations. It is not at all encouraging to hear that, even 10 years after the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009) — which mandated the Secretary-General to list parties to armed conflict engaging in patterns of killing and maiming children and/or committing rape and other sexual violence against children — the number of cases of the killing and maiming of children in 2018 was the highest recorded, at more than 12,000, since a mechanism to monitor and report on violations was set up in 2005. The number of cases of sexual violence is also rising. We hope that resolution 2467 (2019), which was adopted by the Council this year, will act to provide an effective means of preventing any further rise.

The initiatives undertaken by the Secretary-General have yielded significant and tangible successes. As reflected in the Secretary-General's report last year, too (see S/2018/465), several listed parties to armed conflict signed agreements to adopt action plans to end their recruitment or use of child soldiers. The United Nations system-wide response has also been laudable. We are happy to learn that some positive

developments took place in 2018, including the release and reintegration of 13,600 former child soldiers. However, we agree with Special Representative Gamba that more focus is needed on that issue. We are happy to note that this year, no new entity is listed in the annexes of the annual report. While the Special Representative and her team deserve our commendation, we also commend the Security Council for its continued efforts. In this connection, I take this opportunity to thank UNICEF for its leadership role in the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

The use of children by non-State armed groups does not take place in a vacuum. Conditions that might make children in those settings vulnerable to recruitment include poverty, discrimination, inequality, exclusion, a culture of political violence, tensions over issues of religion and identity and a history of the use of child soldiers. Achieving success in ending children's involvement in armed conflict therefore depends largely on addressing the root causes of motivation and desperation and on building societies in which children's rights and dignity and the hope for a better future for all children are upheld. In our view, the parties responsible for the unfortunate situation facing children should be held accountable for their actions.

Children are our future and they bear the torch of the culture of peace. We believe in their rights and the realization of their full potential. It is our solemn duty to protect their physical safety and their right to live on planet Earth with their minds free of fear and filled with hopes and dreams. In that conviction, Bangladesh signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols at the very first opportunity. Bangladesh committed itself to protecting, promoting and defending children's rights. Under the direction of our honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh is undertaking all efforts to invest in children's education, health care and skills-development opportunities in order to enable them to take part in our nation-building activities in due course.

In this connection, let me report once again that over 500,000 Rohingya children have fled to Bangladesh since the start of the huge influx of Rohingya in August 2017 as a result of the extreme violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state. During the exodus, they experienced immense suffering and trauma that will require time to heal. They now face a bleak future, despite the efforts of our Government and the international community, with few opportunities and no clear idea of when they

might return home. If we do not make sure of their return in a safe and dignified manner, there will be a real danger of seeing a lost generation of Rohingya children — children who lack the skills they would need to deal with their future.

As international efforts are under way to prevent the Rohingya from falling prey to despair, some are apprehending that about half a million able-bodied Rohingya children could potentially become entangled in activities that might endanger their future and the communities in which they live. I would therefore like to reiterate our call on Myanmar to ensure conducive conditions in Rakhine state for their safe, voluntary and dignified return. I urge the international community, and particularly the Security Council, to provide the guidance and necessary custodianship for the peaceful resolution of this crisis.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian Arab Republic regrets the continued tendency of the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/509) to give primacy to political considerations over human rights issues, thereby failing to provide an objective perspective on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. The recent developments on the ground cited by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in her latest briefing are characterized by several fallacies, most notably the erroneous legal perspective that the counter-terrorism operations being carried out by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies — which constitute a legitimate right under international law — are on an equal footing with the Turkish aggression and occupation of Syrian territory, which represent a clear violation of international law, particularly in terms of the allegations of recruitment, detention and sexual violence.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has once again sought to indict the Syrian Government in the face of those violations. We wish to recall that on several occasions, we have asked the Special Representative to inform us in advance of the cases, names and details in the report so as to enable us to validate them and conduct our own investigations to verify whether they were true. However, she has ignored our request and insisted on her own perspective. We wish to remind the Special Representative that all relevant Syrian legislation is based on the principle of

providing special protection to children, in line with the Syrian Constitution. That is also something we have repeatedly pointed out in response to her reports.

With regard to the implementation of our legislative framework, Law No. 11/2013 allowed us to establish measures in line with our national efforts to help children recruited by armed terrorist groups with a view to saving them from exploitation by those groups and in order to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Children are also covered under our Juvenile Act No. 18/1974, which is based primarily on corrective measures and includes procedural rules and special courts that treat children as victims, regardless of their actions. Our laws prioritize the best interests of children in terms of physical and psychological care as well as their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. All forms of physical abuse and sexual violence are punishable by severe penalties under criminal law. Moreover, with regard to the management of military operations, we wish to reaffirm the commitment of the Syrian Arab Army to the rules of international humanitarian law in the context of our counter-terrorism efforts, particularly with regard to the principle of proportionality, the distinction between civilian and military targets, precaution and the non-use of prohibited weapons.

In the light of the fabricated allegations made by the representative of the Turkish regime, my delegation wishes to reiterate that the Turkish Government is a key partner of the armed terrorist groups currently deployed in Idlib. Despite the Turkish regime being one of the guarantors of the Astana process, Syria does not believe that it is earnestly implementing the agreements, which

were designed to ensure the removal of terrorist groups, together with heavy and mid-sized weapons, from the region. On the contrary, the number of terrorists in Idlib, especially foreigner terrorist fighters, has increased. The Turkish regime is not only financing and providing weapons to terrorist groups, such as the Al-Nusra Front and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, it is even carrying out direct military aggression exercises against Syria, with 10,655 soldiers and officers deployed on Syrian territory, as well as 166 tanks, 278 armoured vehicles, 18 rocket launchers, 73 mortars, 73 vehicles equipped with heavy machine guns and 41 anti-tank missile launchers.

Other violations being committed by the Turkish regime are no less dangerous than its military deployment. The Government of the Justice and Development Party of Turkey has appointed a Turkish governor to Afrin, and the Minister of the Interior of Turkey has appointed officials to the cities of Azaz, Jarabulus and Marea. The Turkish language has also been imposed on schools and educational curricula. Telecommunications towers have been built in Idlib. Syrian agricultural products such as olives are being stolen and sold by the Turkish regime at international markets around the world. Terrorists who support the Turkish regime are stealing artefacts from Ain Dara and other areas such as Afrin and its suburbs before being transported to Turkey.

In the light of everything I have just mentioned, Syria considers the Turkish regime to be a partner to the terrorists against Syria and an aggressor. We believe that we have a right to take all necessary actions to defend our sovereignty.

*The meeting rose at 7 p.m.*