Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	**1597**
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
Titel:	Contribution of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to the Universal Periodic Review of Iraq, 2024
Udgivet:	Juli 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	3. april 2025

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Contribution of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to the Universal Periodic Review of Iraq, 2024

The information provided has been gathered by the UN Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) in Iraq. It has been collected and verified by the United Nations based on the guidelines of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children (MRM), established through Security Council resolution 1612 (2005).

https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/

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Input for the Universal Periodic Review of Iraq

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

July 2024

Background

The Government of Iraq declared Da'esh defeated on 9 December 2017 and Iraq has since made significant progress towards national reconciliation and stability. Grave violations against children committed in the context of the conflict and verified by the United Nations Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), co-chaired by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and UNICEF, have significantly decreased since then.

In the years since 2020, Da'esh has continued attacks against civilians and Iraqi security forces, primarily in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates, while Iraqi security forces conducted counter-terrorism operations in response. Moreover, the United Nations verified attacks on populated areas by the People's Defence Forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (HPG/PKK) in northern Iraq, including grave violations against children. The Turkish military air strikes against HPG/PKK targets continued in Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah Governorates. The Revolutionary Guard Corps of the Islamic Republic of Iran launched strikes against Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in northern Iraq. Further, the Sinjar Resistance Units remained active in Sinjar district, Ninawa Governorate. Overall, the security situation, especially on the border between Iraq and Türkiye, posed challenges for the documentation and verification of grave violations against children.

Between 2020 and 2023, the highest numbers of grave violations were verified in 2021 (288) and 2022 (202) followed by a significant decrease in 2023 (61). Over the said period, the killing and maiming of children was the most prevalent violation with the number of child casualties ranging from 159 in 2021 to 52 in 2023. While Iraqi security forces continued to conduct clearance operations in areas formerly controlled by Da'esh, explosive ordnance caused the majority of child casualties, highlighting the urgent need for continued demining activities. Verified incidents of sexual violence and abductions were relatively low between 2020 and 2023. Most of these cases related to incidents where children were abducted by Da'esh in 2014-2015 and were only liberated later. In 2021, there was a notable increase in the number of incidents of denial of humanitarian access (118). However, this trend was reversed the following year (19) and no cases of denial of humanitarian access were verified in 2023.

Iraq remained committed to the repatriation of its citizens from Hawl camp in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic under the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees. In 2023 alone, the Government of Iraq repatriated 2,255 Iraqi children to Jad'ah 1 rehabilitation centre, where they received support, including in the areas of health, nutrition, education, mental health and psychosocial support. Nevertheless, children continued to face challenges, especially in relation to the lack of documentation, which continued to impede their access to education and other services and could undermine their reintegration into communities of origin and social cohesion in the future.

The continued detention of children on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association with Da'esh, has remained of concern. As of December 2023, 749 children remained in detention on such charges. Most of these children were boys aged between 15 and 17 years, but some of them were as young as 9. Children detained on such charges continued to face challenges in gaining access to legal, educational, social and other services.

On 30 March 2023, the Iraqi Government signed an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). As of March 2024, the Government has completed all activities of the action plan, including the establishment of a Human Rights Directorate and complaints desk in the PMF, the appointment of focal points, the re-issuance of command orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of children, the provision of training on child protection and strengthened age assessment procedures. No cases of recruitment and use by the PMF have been verified since 2021. The PMF were delisted for the recruitment and use of children in the 2023 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/77/895-S/2023/363), covering the year 2022.

Da'esh remains listed in the annexes of the latest report of the of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/78/842-S/2024/384) for the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abduction of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

Recommendations to Iraq

- **Institutionalize** child protection by developing preventive frameworks, including by adopting the draft child protection law in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights law.

- **Continue** clearing contaminated areas, prioritizing areas of return of Internal Displaced Persons and child-friendly spaces, and **providing** education regarding the risks of explosive ordnance and assistance to victims.

- **Urgently facilitate** legal documentation, such as birth registration, for all children in Iraq.

- **Treat** children primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards. Children should be detained only as a last resort and for the shortest period. **Release** children to child protection actors and **ensure** access for formerly detained children to services, assistance, and protection.

- **Continue** repatriating Iraqi children from Hawl camp in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic and **provide** them with specialized services, including in the areas of health, nutrition, education, mental health and psychosocial support.

- **Strengthen** long-term community-based reintegration with a focus on social cohesion to overcome stigma and discrimination.

Iraq

. he United Nations verified grave violations against children (oys, girls), including girls ho ere victims of multiple violations. n addition, grave violations that occurred in previous years ere verified.

. As of ecem er, children (oys, girls) remained in detention on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association ith armed groups, primarily Da'esh.

. A total of children (oys, girls) ere illed ( ) and maimed ( ) y unidentified perpetrators (46), Turkish military air strikes against People's Defence Forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (HPG/PKK) targets (4) and Da'esh (2). Most incidents occurred in areas previously under the control of Da'esh. Child casualties resulted from e plosive ordnance ( ), air stri es ( ), ground engagement ( ) and crossfire ( ).

. Se ual violence perpetrated against three girls by Da'esh was verified. The violations egan in , hen the girls ere a ducted, and continued until their rescue in .

. One attac on a school y unidentified perpetrators as verified. Some schools that had previously een used militarily ere vacated y the ra i security forces, hile the military use of schools, hich had een reported previously, y the ra i ederal olice ( ) and the opular Mo ili ation orces ( ) continued.

. he a duction of five children (2 boys, 3 girls) by Da'esh (4) and the People's Defence Forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (1) was verified. All the children ere released.

Developments and concerns

. commend the Government for the completion of the activities of the action plan, including the esta lishment of a uman Rights irectorate and complaints des in the opular Mo ili ation orces, the appointment of focal points, the re-issuance of command orders prohi iting the recruitment and use of children, the provision of training on child protection and strengthened age assessment procedures. note the decision of the Minister of La our in March to esta lish the National Committee for the revention of Child Rights iolations and reventing uture iolations and encourage the s ift operationali ation thereof.

. I welcome the Government's engagement with my Special Representative, including through her visit in anuary , and encourage the Government to further institutionali e child protection y developing preventive frame or s, including y adopting the draft child protection la , ta ing into account its o ligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international human rights la , ensuring legal documentation for all children in ra and strengthening long-term community-ased reintegration, ith the support of the United Nations.

. further elcome the a sence of verified cases of recruitment and use and denial of humanitarian access.

. am concerned that e plosive ordnance remains the leading cause of child casualties. call upon the Government to continue clearing contaminated areas, prioriti ing areas of return and child-friendly spaces, and to provide education regarding the ris s of e plosive ordnance, as ell as assistance to victims.

. note the release of children ho had een detained on national security-related charges, ut remain concerned y the continued detention of children on such charges, including for their actual or alleged association with Da'esh. I reiterate

that children should e treated primarily as victims and in line ith international uvenile ustice standards. Children should e detained only as a last resort and for the shortest period. call upon the Government to release the children to child protection actors and to ensure access for formerly detained children to services, assistance and protection.

. commend the Government for the repatriation of , ra i children (, oys, , girls) from the north-eastern Syrian Ara Repu lic. reiterate my call upon all countries concerned to facilitate and e pedite the voluntary repatriation of children, including those ith suspected family ties to Da'esh.

Israel and the State of Palestine

. On 7 October 2023, Hamas' Izz al- in al- assam rigades and other alestinian armed groups in the Ga a Strip launched a large-scale armed attac on srael hich included numerous acts of terror. n addition, some people, including omen and children, ere a ducted and ta en into the Ga a Strip, ith some su se uently released, including during a seven-day humanitarian pause that started on Novem er. he violence that has een perpetrated since Octo er in srael and the Occupied alestinian erritory – particularly in and around the Ga a Strip – has sha en the region and devastated the lives of millions of alestinians and sraelis. he scale of death and destruction is shoc ing and unprecedented.

. he United Nations verified , grave violations against , children (, oys, , girls sraeli children ( ), alestinian children (,)) in srael ( ) the occupied est an , including East erusalem (,) and in the Ga a Strip (,).

. erified grave violations ere attri uted to sraeli armed and security forces (5,698), Hamas' Izz al- in al- assam rigades ( ), unidentified perpetrators ( ), Israeli settlers (51), Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Al- uds rigades ( ), individual alestinian perpetrators ( ) and alestinian Authority Security orces ( ). n addition, the process of attri ution of verified violations (,) is ongoing.

. O ing to severe access challenges, in particular in the Ga a Strip, the information presented herein does not represent the full scale of violations against children in this situation. sa a significant increase in violations, and the last uarter of the year itnessed idespread violence y all parties to the conflict over , grave violations against children (, sraeli children, , alestinian children) y all parties to the conflict ere reported and are pending verification.

. he United Nations verified violations against sraeli children (oys, girls) in srael ( ), the occupied est an , including East erusalem ( ), and the Gaza Strip (1) by Hamas' Izz al- in al- assam rigades and other armed groups ( ), Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Al- uds rigades ( ), individual alestinian perpetrators ( ), and unidentified perpetrators ( ). Si children ere victims of multiple violations.

. he United Nations verified the use of t o sraeli oys y Hamas' Izz al- in al- assam rigades ( ) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Al- uds rigades ( ) in srael ( ) and in the Ga a Strip ( ) to accompany Hamas' Izz al- in al- assam rigades in house-to-house searches and to film a video.

. he United Nations verified that sraeli children (oys, girls) had een illed in srael ( ) during acts of terror on Octo er (live ammunition ( ), crossfire

For the purposes of the present report, the present section provides information on grave violations in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel.

United Nations S/2024/247

Security Council

Distr.: General
21 March 2024

Original: English

Children and armed conflict in Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fifth report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Iraq and covers the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 September 2023.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in Iraq, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations against children, namely the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals,[a] the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access. Where available, the report contains information on perpetrators. It also outlines the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including on the implementation of the action plan and dialogue with parties.

The report provides a series of recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in Iraq.

[a] For the purposes of the present report, the phrase "protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals", used in Security Council resolutions 1998 (2011), 2143 (2014) and 2427 (2018) as well as in the statements by the President of the Security Council of 17 June 2013 (S/PRST/2013/8) and 31 October 2017 (S/PRST/2017/21), refers to teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, covers the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 September 2023. It is the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report highlights trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in Iraq and provides details on the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report (S/2022/46) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/AC.51/2022/3). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the engagement with parties to the conflict and the implementation of the action plan. Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations are identified.

2. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/77/895-S/2023/363), Da'esh remained listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and abduction under section A, the list of parties that had not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children. As set out in paragraph 344 of the same report, the Popular Mobilization Forces were delisted for the recruitment and use of children. The delisting was conditional upon the finalization of all pending activities contained in the action plan signed on 30 March 2023 and the continued absence of recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces.

3. The information contained in the present report was verified by the country task force on monitoring and reporting in Iraq, co-chaired by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The security situation, especially on the border between Iraq and Türkiye, posed challenges for the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. Therefore, the information set out in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in Iraq, and the actual number of grave violations is likely to be higher. Where incidents occurred earlier but were verified only during the reporting period, that information is qualified as having been verified at a later date.

II. Overview of political and security developments

4. In October 2021, Iraq held parliamentary elections, which were considered largely peaceful, technically well-managed and orderly. However, the subsequent formation of a new Government led to a volatile and politically charged environment. Armed clashes occurred in Baghdad and elsewhere in August 2022, in which at least 51 people, including 2 boys, were killed and 308 were injured, including an unverified number of children. In October 2022, the Council of Representatives of Iraq elected Abdullatif Jamal Rashid as President of Iraq and confirmed the new Government led by the Prime Minister, Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani.

5. During the reporting period, Da'esh continued regular small-scale, asymmetric attacks against civilians and Iraqi security forces. A total of 178 attacks were

Following the adoption of resolution 75/291 by the General Assembly, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is now referred to as Da'esh in documents originating from the United Nations Secretariat.

attributed to Da'esh during the first half of 2023, compared with 526 attacks during the first half of 2022. The 178 attacks recorded in the first half of 2023, which resulted in two child casualties, represented the lowest number of attacks recorded over a six-month period since Iraq declared victory over Da'esh in December 2017.

6. Iraqi security forces, including the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police, continued to conduct counter-terrorism operations against Da'esh, exposing their hideouts, tunnels and weapon depots. Military operations often involved efforts to reinforce the border with the Syrian Arab Republic against possible incursions by Da'esh. Throughout the reporting period, the Iraqi security forces conducted security operations in areas where Da'esh was active. Iraqi security forces also continued to conduct explosive ordnance clearance operations in areas formerly controlled by Da'esh.

7. During the reporting period, the country task force verified attacks on populated civilian areas and intimidation of the civilian population by the People's Defence Forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (HPG/PKK) in northern Iraq, including grave violations against children. The country task force attributed grave violations, including recruitment and abduction of children, to HPG/PKK. Further, as noted in my previous report (S/2022/46), the Sinjar Resistance Units remained active in Sinjar district, Ninawa Governorate.

8. Further, during the period under review, the Turkish Armed Forces conducted ground and air operations against alleged HPG/PKK positions, including in Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah Governorates.

9. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched missile and drone strikes against Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in northern Iraq. In March 2023, Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed a border security agreement that included steps towards the disarmament of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups.

10. Iraq remained committed to the repatriation of its citizens from Hawl camp in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic under the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees. During the reporting period, the Government of Iraq repatriated a total of 3,523 children (1,817 boys, 1,706 girls) to Jad'ah 1 rehabilitation centre, where they received support, including in the areas of health, nutrition, education, mental health and psychosocial support. Nevertheless, children continued to face challenges, especially in relation to the lack of documentation, which continued to impede their access to education and other services and could undermine their reintegration into communities of origin and social cohesion in the future. In addition, unaccompanied and separated children, as well as children with disabilities, require further specialized support.

III. Grave violations against children

11. The country task force verified 381 grave violations against 289 children (218 boys, 70 girls, 1 sex unknown). This is an increase of 20 per cent compared with the previous report (S/2022/46). The country task force verified 132 violations in the second half of 2021, 201 violations in 2022 and 48 violations between January and September 2023. Killing and maiming remained the most verified violation (236), followed by the denial of humanitarian access (75) and recruitment and use (32). A total of 11 children (2 boys, 9 girls) were victims of multiple violations: abduction and sexual violence (8); recruitment and use and killing (2);and abduction and recruitment and use (1).

12. Violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (183), including as a result of explosive ordnance (154) and during crossfire between the Turkish Armed

Forces and HPG/PKK (2), between Iraqi security forces and Da'esh (2) and between Iraqi security forces and Sinjar Resistance Units/HPG/PKK (2), to the Iraqi security forces (74), Da'esh (54), HPG/PKK (35), Turkish Armed Forces (19), the Popular Mobilization Forces (12) and IRGC (4).

13. Grave violations were verified in the Governorates of Ninawa (123), Kirkuk (51), Diyala (34), Salah al-Din (33), Baghdad (27), Dahuk (25), Basrah (22), Babil (18), Anbar (12) and Erbil (11), Nasiriyah (7), Muthanna (5), Diwaniyah (5), Sulaymaniyah (5), Najaf (2) and Maysan (1).

14. In addition, during the period under review, the country task force verified 48 grave violations against 33 children (11 boys, 22 girls) that had occurred in previous reporting periods: abduction (24), sexual violence (14), killing and maiming (9) and recruitment and use (1). Violations were attributed to Da'esh (39), the international counter-Da'esh coalition (6) and unidentified perpetrators (3).

A. Recruitment and use

15. The recruitment and use of 32 children (18 boys, 14 girls), some as young as 7, was verified. This represents a significant increase compared with the previous reporting period (S/2022/46), during which only 1 case was verified. All cases of recruitment and use were verified in 2022. While these verified incidents highlight emblematic protection concerns, the actual number of children recruited and used is likely higher, as many cases are not reported owing to the fear of reprisals or cannot be verified owing to accessibility challenges and security concerns, especially in Ninawa, Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah Governates.

16. Incidents of recruitment and use were attributed to HPG/PKK (28) and Da'esh (4) and occurred in Ninawa (31) and Sulaymaniyah (1) Governates.

17. Financial incentives were the main factors driving recruitment, as families sought to have their children earn a "salary" from HPG/PKK in order to ease economic hardship. Four children were abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use. Children were used in combat and support roles, including to guard checkpoints, gather intelligence and act as messengers. For instance, a 16-year-old girl was recruited and used in a combat role by HPG/PKK. In October 2022, the girl was killed in an air strike by the Turkish Armed Forces against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) targets in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

18. The country task force verified an earlier incident of the recruitment and use of a Yazidi boy by Da'esh. The boy was taken to the Syrian Arab Republic and trained in the use of weapons despite being only 5 years old at the time. The boy managed to escape in 2021 and was later reunited with his family in Iraq.

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

19. At the end of the reporting period, a total of 668 children (663 boys, 5 girls) continued to be detained by Iraqi security forces on national security-related charges, including for their alleged association with armed groups, primarily Da'esh. This is a decrease compared with the 1,091 children previously detained (S/2022/46). Most of these children were boys between the ages of 15 and 17, but some of them were as young as 9. Children detained on such charges continued to face challenges in gaining access to legal, educational, social and other services. The country task force continued to advocate that the Government of Iraq treat all children formerly associated with Da'esh primarily as victims and urged the Government to take concrete steps to facilitate their release, recovery and community-based reintegration.

20. In March 2023, the Government of Iraq repatriated 203 boys through prison transfers from north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic. It was verified that at least some of the boys were prosecuted under domestic anti-terrorism legislation of Iraq. The proceedings were closed, however, and the country task force did not have full access to independently verify how many juveniles underwent a trial and were subsequently convicted or cleared of charges and released.

B. Killing and maiming

21. The country task force verified the killing (107) and maiming (129) of 236 children (189 boys, 46 girls, 1 sex unknown) between the ages of 1 and 17. Of these, 71 were killed or maimed in the second half of 2021, 126 in 2022 and 39 between January and September 2023. This is a slight decrease in child casualties compared to the previous report (249) (S/2022/46), likely attributable to a stabilizing security situation.

22. Child casualties were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (176), including as a result of explosive ordnance (140), improvised explosive devices (14), and crossfire between Iraqi security forces and HPG/PKK (2), Iraqi security forces and Da'esh (2) and between the Turkish Armed Forces and HPG/PKK (2), to Da'esh (25), the Turkish Armed Forces (17), Iraqi security forces (12), IRGC (3) and HPG/PKK (3).

23. Most child casualties were verified in areas that had previously been under Da'esh control and where the group remained active, with violations verified in Diyala (34), Ninawa (32), Kirkuk (24), Salah al-Din (25), Baghdad (25), Basrah (22), Dahuk (20), Babil (18), Anbar (10), Erbil (9), Nasiriyah (6), Muthanna (6) Sulaymaniyah (3) and Najaf (2) Governorates.

24. Explosive ordnance and improvised explosive devices continued to be the leading causes of child casualties, amounting to 65 per cent of the total number of casualties. The predominantly affected areas were those that had previously been under Da'esh control. For example, in July 2021, a Da'esh suicide attack killed 8 children (6 boys, 2 girls) and maimed 7 children (4 boys, 3 girls) in Waheilat market in Baghdad. In most cases, children were harmed by accidentally triggering devices when they picked them up or stepped on them while herding livestock or playing. For example, in February 2022, 7 boys, between the ages of 1 and 17, were killed (2) and maimed (5) when they touched a device while playing in a field in Basrah Governorate, causing it to explode.

25. Ground engagements (62) and air strikes (20) were the second and third most prevalent causes of child casualties. For instance, in September 2022 IRGC launched a strike on Kuyah, Erbil Governorate, which hit military bases but also civilian homes, offices and an elementary school. The attack killed 13 people and injured 33, including 2 girls.

26. In addition, the killing (3) and maiming (6) of 9 children (7 boys, 2 girls) prior to the reporting period was verified and attributed to the international counter-Da'esh coalition (6) and unidentified perpetrators (3), including due to explosive ordnance (2).

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

27. The United Nations verified sexual violence against 8 girls between the ages of 11 and 16, attributed to Da'esh. Da'esh abducted the girls in 2014 (at the time of abduction, ranging in age from 2 to 5 years old) from Ninawa Governorate, took them to the Syrian Arab Republic and sold them to Da'esh members as sex slaves, where they remained until they were rescued by the Syrian Democratic Forces in 2022.

All the girls were reunited with their families upon their return to Iraq in 2022 (5) and 2023 (3) and received medical, mental, psychosocial and educational support.

28. The United Nations verified 14 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence that had been perpetrated prior to the reporting period against 14 girls abducted by Da'esh; the girls became adults during their captivity. The girls were all abducted in 2014 from Sinjar, Ninawa Governorate and taken to the Syrian Arab Republic, where they continued to be sexually abused until their liberation by the Syrian Democratic Forces. All girls were reunited with their families and received case management, health, psychosocial, livelihood and reintegration support.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

29. The country task force verified 6 attacks on schools (4) and hospitals (2). Instances were verified in 2021 (3), in 2022 (2) and in 2023 (1) and were attributed to Da'esh (2), unidentified perpetrators (2), the Turkish Armed Forces (1) and IRGC (1). For example, in August 2021, the Turkish Armed Forces shelled and destroyed a health facility, killing a 12-year-old boy, a doctor and a medical worker in Sinjar district. The facility was known to serve as the headquarters of the Sinjar Resistance Units and HPG/PKK but was also used as a field hospital, treating combatants and civilians.

Military use of schools

30. The country task force verified 42 instances of the military use of schools in 2021 (35) and 2022 (7) by the Iraqi police (28), Iraqi security forces (7), the Popular Mobilization Forces (4), Peshmerga (2) and HPG/PKK (1), in Kirkuk (34), Ninawa (7) and Salah al-Din (1) Governates. At the end of the reporting period, 22 schools continued to be used for military purposes by the Iraqi police (18) and the Popular Mobilization Forces (4), in Kirkuk (20), Salah al-Din (1) and Ninawa (1) Governates. Advocacy of the country task force to vacate the remaining schools is ongoing. The country task force continued to verify reports of additional schools having been vacated by the Iraqi police.

E. Abduction

31. The United Nations verified the abduction of 23 children (12 boys, 11 girls) between the ages of 5 and 16. Cases of abduction were verified in 2021 (1), 2022 (17) and 2023 (5). Children were abducted for periods ranging from several months to nine years. Among those abducted, 9 children (1 boy, 8 girls) were victims of multiple violations: abduction and sexual violence (8); and abduction and recruitment and use (1).

32. Abductions were attributed to Da'esh (15), HPGKurdistan Workers' Party (4) and unidentified perpetrators (4), in Ninawa (15), Dahuk (3), Diyala (2), Erbil (1), Kirkuk (1) and Sulaymaniyah (1) Governorates. Children were abducted for the purposes of sexual violence (8), recruitment and use (1) and for unknown reasons (13). A total of 16 children (6 boys, 10 girls) were released, while 7 children remained missing at the end of the reporting period.

33. For example, in August 2022, three boys between the ages of 10 and 13 were abducted by unidentified perpetrators from a camp for internally displaced persons, in Dahuk, and continued to be unaccounted for.

34. In addition, the country task force late verified the abduction of 24 children (4 boys, 20 girls) by Da'esh (24) in Ninawa Governate (24), who became adults during their captivity. The children were abducted in 2014 and remained in captivity

until their rescue during the reporting period. Some 15 children were victims of multiple violations during their abduction: sexual violence (14 girls) and recruitment and use (1 boy).

F. Denial of humanitarian access

35. The country task force verified 76 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access. Of these, 57 incidents occurred in the second half of 2021 and 19 incidents occurred in 2022. In 2023, no incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, indicating a positive step in enabling humanitarians to provide much-needed services to children.

36. The verified incidents were attributed to Iraqi security forces (62), the Popular Mobilization Forces (12), the Turkish Armed Forces (1) and unidentified perpetrators (1), in Kirkuk (27), Anbar (15), Ninawa (15), Diyala (8), Salah al-Din (8) and Baghdad (3).

37. Incidents of the denial of humanitarian access mostly related to administrative restrictions that limited or slowed the movement of humanitarian personnel and goods, thereby hampering humanitarian operations. Some instances also included the denial of passage at checkpoints and the prevention of access to certain areas.

IV. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children

38. The country task force continued to engage with the Government of Iraq on strengthening the protection of children, including through the adoption and implementation of the action plan with the Popular Mobilization Forces to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. The action plan, which was signed on 30 March 2023, required the Popular Mobilization Forces to adopt administrative measures in order to enhance the protection of children from grave violations, particularly the recruitment and use of children.

39. The country task force also continued to engage with the national committee for the monitoring and reporting mechanism to support the implementation of the action plan. On 1 June 2023, the Government appointed the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and a representative of the Popular Mobilization Forces as focal points to facilitate coordination among Government departments for the effective implementation of the action plan.

40. In order to ensure that potential recruits meet the minimum age requirement of 18 years and that recruitment procedures align with international standards, on 5 June 2023 the Popular Mobilization Forces issued specific command orders to all units instructing them to conduct rigorous screening and age assessments.

41. On 19 September 2023, the country task force and the national committee for the monitoring and reporting mechanism visited the administration offices of the Popular Mobilization Forces to assess the recruitment procedures and the protocols in place for age assessment to prevent the recruitment of children. The assessment visit found that appropriate procedures to prevent the recruitment of children had been put in place.

42. As stipulated in the action plan, the Popular Mobilization Forces further established a dedicated Human Rights Directorate within its structure, on 26 June 2023. The Directorate's primary objective is to monitor and oversee activities relating to human rights and children's rights, assess the impact of the measures implemented

and recommend improvements for a more robust human rights framework during military operations.

43. Also in June 2023, the Popular Mobilization Forces and the country task force conducted two capacity-building training sessions with a focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as part of the implementation of the action plan. The training sessions were aimed at strengthening knowledge and skills on the protection of children among members of the Popular Mobilization Forces.

44. Throughout the reporting period, the country task force supported the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government in harmonizing domestic legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international human rights treaties to which Iraq is a party. In July 2023, a review of the juvenile care law was completed by a Commission established by the Minister of Justice and the Juvenile Care Council. The review included a recommendation to increase the age of criminal responsibility in federal Iraq from 9 to 12 years. At the end of the reporting period, the recommendations for amendments to the juvenile care law were with the women, family and child parliamentary committee for review.

45. In September 2023, the country task force participated in a workshop on the review of the draft child protection law. The workshop was attended by members of the women, family and child parliamentary committee, Government legal advisers and the Child Welfare Commission. The objective was to raise awareness and encourage ownership of the child protection law among various stakeholders, with a focus on addressing areas such as children lacking legal documentation and accountability for child recruitment by armed groups.

46. The Government of Iraq, with support from the United Nations under the Global Framework, continued to repatriate its nationals from Hawl camp in north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic. The Government repatriated a total of 5,818 individuals, including 3,523 children, to Jad‘ah 1 rehabilitation centre in Ninawa Governorate. Among those repatriated, 3,364 individuals have since departed Jad‘ah 1 to their places of origin or secondary locations, in cases where a return to the place of origin was not possible. Also under the Global Framework, 203 boys were repatriated through prison transfers.

47. The technical working group on the implementation of the Global Framework in Iraq, co-chaired by the Government’s Office of the National Security Adviser, the International Organization for Migration and UNICEF, continued to coordinate United Nations support through the “One United Nations” plan for supporting the return of Iraqi nationals from north-east Syrian Arab Republic, which was launched jointly by the Government and the United Nations on 24 September 2023. The plan details the full scope of work under the two pillars of the Global Framework: (a) security and accountability; and (b) development and recovery, with a focus on a rights-based approach to return, rehabilitation and reintegration processes, including for children.

48. In Jad‘ah 1, the Government provided a variety of services to children, including formal education, activities to promote national identity and resocialization, religious lectures, family visits to restore family relationships, and support to families so as to prepare them for reintegration into their communities of origin. The United Nations continued engaging with the Government of Iraq on solutions for the issuance of civil documentation for returnees, including children, which remained a critical barrier in terms of reintegration and access to education and social protection services.

49. Further, the United Nations continued to support the Government of Iraq in providing services, including for individuals in Jad‘ah 1 and communities of return, ranging from mental health and psychosocial support to early childhood development,

health care, nutritional support, water, sanitation and hygiene, informal education, recreational activities, vocational training, legal assistance, specialized child protection and services to prevent and address gender-based violence, as well as family tracing and alternative care for unaccompanied children.

50. The Government and United Nations partners, such as social workers and child rights organizations, also continued to support returnees in their communities of origin or relocation. The country task force continued to partner with local organizations to support the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups and children at risk of grave violations through community-based reintegration and social cohesion programmes. The programmes reached 1,800 children (1,200 boys, 600 girls) in Anbar, Basrah, Diyala, Karbala, Kirkuk, Najaf, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. Reintegration and social cohesion activities included the provision of mental health and psychological services, legal advice and facilitating access to education, vocational training, life skills and case management support.

51. In addition, the country task force provided training on child protection to strengthen awareness and build capacity in ending and preventing grave violations against children. The country task force held training sessions for 372 participants (238 men, 134 women) of the Iraqi national child protection network, which included representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations.

52. Over 1,000 persons, including 615 children (450 boys, 165 girls) received child rights education through information sessions and targeted messaging in schools around Baghdad.

V. Observations and recommendations

53. I remain concerned that grave violations against children continue to be committed in Iraq, in particular the recruitment and use and the abduction of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals. I urge all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law and to immediately end and prevent grave violations against children in Iraq.

54. I welcome the absence of verified cases of recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces, as well as the signature of an action plan by the Government of Iraq and the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. I encourage the Government to continue prioritizing the implementation of the action plan and to continue institutionalizing the measures taken in the implementation of the action plan to sustainably prevent grave violations against children.

55. I welcome the invitation extended to my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to visit Iraq from 7 to 11 January 2024 to discuss the progress in implementing the action plan and to engage with the Government on areas in which the United Nations may offer further support.

56. I am concerned about the increase in the recruitment and use of children by HPG/PKK. I urge HPG/PKK to end the recruitment and use of children and to unconditionally and immediately release all children from its ranks.

57. I remain particularly concerned about continuing incidents of killing and maiming of children, and about the impact on children of the contamination of Iraqi territory by explosive ordnance, which is the leading cause of child casualties. I urge all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to

avoid and minimize harm and better protect children, including in the conduct of military operations and from the risks and effects of explosive remnants of war and the use of explosive weapons, including in populated areas. I further call upon the Government to continue promoting explosive ordnance clearance, explosive ordnance risk education, victim assistance and stockpile destruction, including prior to any movement of internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas. The United Nations will continue to support the Iraqi authorities in this regard.

58. I am encouraged by the decrease in the number of children detained on national security-related charges, including for their or their families' actual or alleged association with armed groups, primarily Da'esh. I call upon the Government of Iraq to release children held on such grounds and reiterate that children formerly associated with armed forces and groups should be treated primarily as victims and that alternatives to detention should be pursued in accordance with international law and in line with international standards on juvenile justice.

59. When children are suspected of having committed criminal acts, I reiterate that due process and fair trial standards must be adhered to. Any prosecution of children should respect international standards on juvenile justice. I further call upon the Government of Iraq to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility in accordance with international standards.

60. I commend the Government of Iraq for its repatriation of 3,523 children from Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic and its commitment to continue such repatriations. I also commend the Government for the provision of specialized services to repatriated children, such as formal education and activities to promote national identity and resocialization.

61. I reiterate my call upon all concerned countries to facilitate and expedite the voluntary repatriation of women and children in Hawl and Rawj camps in the Syrian Arab Republic in line with international law and grounded in respect for the principles of non-refoulement, family unity and the best interests of the child, and with the support of the United Nations, upon request, including through the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees.

62. I call upon the Government of Iraq to develop and implement a national community-based reintegration programme for children affected by armed conflict, with the support of the United Nations and other actors.

63. I welcome the decrease in verified cases of the denial of humanitarian access during the reporting period, alongside the absence of any verified such incidents in 2023. I call upon all parties to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to children.

68. I welcome the signature of the unilateral commitments to protect children by Mai-Mai Machine and the release of 272 children by armed groups following United Nations advocacy.

69. I remain deeply troubled by the devastatingly high number of grave violations against children, in particular by armed groups, and the increase in killing and maiming, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals. I am deeply concerned about the deterioration of the security situation, in particular in North Kivu and Ituri, including owing to the resurgence of M23, and the resulting access restrictions on the United Nations to monitor violations.

Iraq

70. The United Nations verified 202 grave violations against 173 children (125 boys, 48 girls), including 8 children who were victims of multiple violations. In addition, 17 grave violations affecting 15 children that had occurred in previous years (6 boys, 9 girls) were verified in 2022.

71. A total of 32 children (18 boys, 14 girls), as young as age 11, were recruited and used by the People's Defence Forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (HPG/PKK) (28) and Da'esh (4). In addition, the United Nations verified in 2022 the recruitment and use of one boy by HPG/PKK that had occurred in previous years. Children were used in combat and at checkpoints.

72. As at December 2022, 936 children (927 boys, 9 girls) remained in detention on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, primarily Da'esh.

73. A total of 126 children (101 boys, 25 girls) were killed (55) and maimed (71) by unidentified perpetrators (100), Turkish military air strikes against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) targets (15), Da'esh (6), HPG/PKK (3) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2). Most incidents occurred in areas previously under the control of Da'esh. Child casualties resulted from explosive remnants of war (85), ground engagement (17), air strikes (17) and crossfire (7). In addition, the killing (1) and maiming (6) of 7 children by the international counter-Da'esh coalition (4) and unidentified perpetrators (3) that had occurred in previous years were verified in 2022.

74. Sexual violence perpetrated against five girls by Da'esh was verified. The violations began in 2014, when the girls were abducted, and continued until 2022, when the girls were rescued. In addition, the United Nations verified in 2022 sexual violence perpetrated against three girls by Da'esh that had occurred in previous years.

75. Two attacks on schools were verified and attributed to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (1) and unidentified perpetrators (1). In total, 7 instances of the military use of schools were verified by Iraqi security forces (4), the Iraqi Federal Police (1), the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) (1) and HPG/PKK (1). Some 35 schools remained militarily used by the Iraqi Federal Police (23), Iraqi security forces (7), PMF (4) and Peshmerga (1).

76. The abduction of 18 children (9 boys, 9 girls) by Da'esh (10), HPG/PKK (4) and unidentified perpetrators (4) was verified. A total of six children were abducted for recruitment and use and/or sexual violence purposes. A total of 11 children were released, and 7 children remain in captivity. The United Nations verified in 2022 the abduction of six girls by Da'esh that had occurred in previous years.

77. A total of 19 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were attributed to Iraqi security forces (13), PMF (5) and the Iraqi police (1).

Developments and concerns

78. I welcome the signature of an action plan by the Government with the United Nations on 30 March 2023 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by PMF and the absence of verified cases of recruitment and use of children by PMF. I urge the Government to fully implement the action plan.

79. I welcome the decrease in verified humanitarian access restrictions, in particular by Iraq security forces, and call upon all parties to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to children.

80. I am gravely concerned by the recruitment and use of children by HPG/PKK. I urge HPG/PKK to end the recruitment and use of children and to release all children from its ranks.

81. I am concerned that explosive ordnance is the leading cause of child casualties. I urge the Government to fully implement international conventions on landmines and explosive remnants of war to which it is a party. I call upon the Government to continue the clearance of areas contaminated by explosive hazards, explosive ordnance risk education, including prior to any movement by internally displaced persons to contaminated areas, and to prioritize victim assistance.

82. I note the release of 230 children detained on national security-related charges, but I remain concerned by the continued detention of children, including on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association with Da'esh. I reiterate that the children should be treated primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards. Children should only be detained as a last resort and for the shortest period of time. I call upon the Government to release the children to child protection actors.

83. I commend the Government for the repatriation of 1,448 Iraqi children from the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate my call upon all countries concerned to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of children, in line with the principle of non-refoulement, with respect for family unity and the best interests of the child, and in accordance with international law.

84. I encourage the Government to facilitate the reintegration of all children affected by armed conflict, with the support of the United Nations.

Israel and the State of Palestine

85. The United Nations verified 3,133 grave violations against 1,139 Palestinian children (1,057 boys, 82 girls) and 8 Israeli children (5 boys, 3 girls) in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel.

86. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 4 Palestinian children (3 boys, 1 girl) by Israeli forces as human shields (3) and by the Nasser Salah al-Din Brigades (1) as combatants in the occupied West Bank (3) and the Gaza Strip (1). Two children reported that the Israeli forces had attempted to recruit them as informants.

87. The United Nations verified the detention of 852 Palestinian children for alleged security offences by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (527), including 17 held under administrative detention. The United Nations received the testimonies of 82 children who reported ill-treatment by Israeli forces while in detention.

For the purposes of the present report, the present section provides information on grave violations in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel.
Of which 563 were caused by tear gas inhalation. See para. 89.

United Nations S/AC.51/2022/3

Security Council

Distr.: General
2 September 2022

Original: English

Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Iraq

1. At its formal meeting on 1 March 2022, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council examined the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2022/46), covering the period from 1 August 2019 to 30 June 2021, which was introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations also addressed the Working Group.

2. The members of the Working Group welcomed the overall decrease in incidents of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict while also expressing deep concern and condemning the violations and abuses which continue to be committed against children affected by armed conflict in Iraq. The members expressed grave concern about the continuing incidents of killing and maiming of children and the impact of explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, which are the leading cause of child casualties. They also expressed concern at denials of humanitarian access and the increased number of children in detention. They expressed support for the stability, prosperity and security of Iraq, in particular in the light of the territorial victory of Iraq over Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh). They welcomed the continued commitment of Iraq to working towards developing an action plan on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children. They discussed several other issues, including the drafting of a comprehensive child rights law, the issuance of civil documentation, the importance of accountability for violations and abuses against children, reintegration programmes, military use of schools, issues related to rape and other forms of sexual violence, children born of rape, and the child protection capacity and efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in support of the Government of Iraq.

3. The members of the Working Group welcomed the report of the Secretary-General. In accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015), 2427 (2018) and 2601 (2021), the Working Group agreed to the direct action as set out below.

Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group

4. The Working Group agreed to address the following message to all parties to the armed conflict in Iraq, in particular Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),

Please recycle

also referred to as Da'esh, while it also concerns all other parties mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, including the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), through a public statement by its Chair:

(a) Strongly condemning all violations and abuses that continue to be committed against children in Iraq, and noting with concern the disproportionate negative impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on children, which further exacerbated existing challenges; and demanding that all parties to conflict immediately end and prevent all abuses and violations against children, including those involving killing and maiming of children, the recruitment and use of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction and the denial of humanitarian access, and comply with their obligations under international law;

(b) Calling upon all parties to further implement the previous conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq (S/AC.51/2020/4);

(c) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict, and stressing that all those responsible must be brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay, including through timely and systematic investigations and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction;

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

(e) Welcoming the significant decrease in cases of recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict identified in the report; and urging all parties to release immediately and without preconditions all children who may be associated with them, to hand them over to relevant civilian child protection actors in coordination with the respective Iraqi authorities and to end and prevent the further recruitment and use of children, consistent with their obligations under international law, including, as applicable, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

(f) Expressing concern about the increasingly high number of incidents of deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed forces or armed groups, or for such association or alleged association of their parents or relatives, including with terrorist groups who are designated as such by the Security Council, primarily Da'esh; noting the significant challenges faced by those detained in gaining access to legal, social and other services; urging all parties to conflict to treat associated children, including those who may have committed crimes, primarily as victims of recruitment and use, to work to ensure their full reintegration through family- and community-based reintegration programmes, including access to health care, mental health and psychosocial support and inclusive, equitable and quality education programmes, as well as by raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of these children and facilitate their return, to provide access to the United Nations to all detention centres and any other facilities in which children are held, in coordination with the respective Iraqi authorities, and to ensure that, where children face prosecution for allegedly committing crimes, those prosecutions are carried out with respect for the rights of the child, and that alternatives to judicial proceedings should be sought for children, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and urging the relevant parties and Governments, including the countries of origin of foreign children deprived of liberty in Iraq, to cooperate with the United Nations and the Iraqi authorities to seek rights-based durable solutions;

(g) Expressing grave concern at the incidents of children killed and maimed, noting that the majority of cases were caused by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices and that children were harmed while herding livestock in areas surrounding villages or while playing predominantly in areas that had previously been under Da'esh control, urging all parties to take all necessary action to better protect children and prevent such acts, especially with a view to ensuring that children are protected from explosive remnants of war, and calling upon all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality and the obligation to take all feasible precautions to avoid and, in any event, minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects;

(h) Expressing deep concern at cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children, noting that incidents of sexual violence continue to be underreported and that none were verified during the reporting period; expressing deep concern at the lack of access to appropriate services for survivors, and also expressing concern that movement restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have increased vulnerabilities and risk factors for survivors and victims of sexual violence; strongly urging all parties to the armed conflict to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children and stressing the importance of accountability for those responsible for sexual and gender-based violence against children; and stressing the importance of providing non-discriminatory and comprehensive specialized services, including mental health and psychosocial support, health, including sexual and reproductive health services, legal and livelihood support and services to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence;

(i) Strongly condemning the attack on a health centre, verified during the reporting period; expressing deep concern at the numbers of incidents of military use of schools and the disruption caused to the education of Iraqi children; calling upon all parties to the armed conflict to comply with applicable international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals, including their personnel as such, and to end and prevent attacks or threats of attacks against those institutions and their personnel, as well as the military use of schools and hospitals in violation of applicable international law; and calling upon all parties to take concrete measures to facilitate the continuation of education of Iraqi children, consistent with Security Council resolution 2601 (2021);

(j) Expressing deep concern at the abduction of children, and calling upon the concerned party to cease the abduction of children and immediately release all abducted children;

(k) Strongly condemning incidents of denial of humanitarian access, and calling upon all parties to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access to children, including to children in internally displaced persons camps or detention independent of their legal status, consistent with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, to respect the exclusively humanitarian nature and impartiality of humanitarian aid, to respect international humanitarian law and to respect the work of all United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners without adverse distinction;

(l) Underlining the importance of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognizing that a strong focus on combating poverty, deprivation and inequality is needed to prevent and protect children from all violations and abuses in the context of armed conflict in Iraq and to promote the resilience of children, their families and their communities and the importance of promoting education for all and peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable

development, and calling upon the international community to remain strongly committed to providing support to Iraq for its humanitarian, stabilization, reconstruction and development efforts;

Da’esh

(m) Condemning in the strongest possible terms the abhorrent violations and abuses and extreme violence committed against children, including children belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, by Da’esh, including their killing and maiming, abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence, noting that such violations and abuses may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity; and furthermore reaffirming that terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, whenever and by whomsoever committed;

(n) Strongly urging Da’esh to immediately:

(i) Cease all attacks directed against civilians and civilian objects, including those resulting in the killing and maiming of children, and comply fully with international humanitarian law by, inter alia, putting an end to any targeting of the civilian population, especially children, as well as to disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks in populated areas, including through terror tactics, attacks by suicide bombers or any other forms of extreme violence or the indiscriminate use of weapons, in particular improvised explosive devices, and any use of weapons prohibited by international law;

(ii) End and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, including through abduction, end the military training of children and release without preconditions all children who remain under their control;

(iii) Cease the rape of and other forms of sexual violence against children, such as child, early and forced marriage, sexual slavery and human trafficking for sexual exploitation, including against children belonging to ethnic and religious minorities;

(iv) Cease the abduction of children and all violations and abuses committed against abducted children, notably girls who face higher rates of abductions in Iraq, release without preconditions all abducted children, and allow for swift family reunification in the best interests of the child or provide information as to their fate if no longer alive.

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

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

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

Recommendations to the Security Council

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

(a) To continue to ensure that the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict continue to be taken into consideration by the Security Council, including when reviewing the mandate of UNAMI and its activities;

(b) To ensure the continuation of and support for the mandate of UNAMI to assist the efforts of the Government of Iraq to strengthen child protection, including by ensuring the continuation of and support for the child protection capacity of UNAMI, especially with regard to monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict, as well as preventing such violations and abuses, including through training on and mainstreaming of child protection;

(c) To communicate the present document to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities.

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

(a) Recognizing the efforts by the Government of Iraq to address the security threats and challenges in maintaining law and order in the country;

(b) Stressing that the Government retains the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, including children, noting in this regard that Iraq is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and other relevant human rights and international humanitarian treaties, including those prohibiting torture, and noting in this regard, in all actions concerning children, the best interest of the child must be a primary consideration;

(c) Welcoming the collaboration of the Government of Iraq with the United Nations to strengthen the protection of children and the ongoing dialogue on an action plan on ending and preventing recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces, and calling upon the Government to finalize the adoption of the action plan and prioritize its implementation;

(d) Welcoming the significant decrease in cases of child recruitment and use by the Popular Mobilization Forces; calling upon the Government to release any children who may be found to be associated with its forces, including the Popular Mobilization Forces, to develop and adopt appropriate handover protocols, to ensure their reintegration in cooperation with civilian child protection actors, and to engage with religious leaders; and also calling upon the Government, including through engagement with the United Nations, to develop a comprehensive national strategy to prevent all six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict;

(e) Commending the Government's continued cooperation with the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting, and welcoming further the continued cooperation between the Government of Iraq and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict;

(f) Welcoming the steps taken towards the development of a comprehensive child rights law, inter alia criminalizing child recruitment and use, and calling for its swift adoption; calling upon the Government to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including those relating to the establishment

of a minimum age of criminal responsibility, and also calling upon the Ministry of Defence to develop and enforce age verification procedures for recruitment by government forces and government-affiliated armed groups;

(g) Commending the Government's efforts to address the needs of the victims and survivors of atrocities committed by Da'esh, welcoming the adoption of the Yazidi Female Survivors Law and encouraging the Government to continue to engage with the United Nations on its implementation, and also encouraging the Government to consider similar provisions to address the needs of other minorities and of male victims and survivors;

(h) Urging the Government to strengthen the provision of and access to specialized and gender-sensitive services for victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence in armed conflict, including those from ethnic and religious minority groups, and to fight and prevent stigmatization of victims, and stressing the importance of accountability for those responsible for sexual and gender-based violence against children;

(i) Commending the release by the Government of children from detention between March 2020 and June 2021 following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and calling upon the Government to consider non-judicial measures as alternatives to prosecution and detention that focus on the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, including psychosocial support; urging the Government to treat these children, including children who may have committed crimes, primarily as victims of recruitment and use, to provide unimpeded, regular and confidential access to children in detention for the United Nations in coordination with the respective Iraqi authorities, and to ensure that, where children face prosecution for allegedly committing crimes, those prosecutions are carried out with respect for the rights of the child, as well as international standards of due process and the right to fair trial, and guarantees in this regard; and calling upon the Government to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking into account that the deprivation of liberty for children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period;

(j) Commending the Government of Iraq for the initial return of Iraqi families, including the significant number of children from neighbouring countries;

(k) Calling upon the Government, in close coordination with and with the support of the United Nations and relevant child protection actors, to ensure the reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to the conflict, including children associated with Da'esh, and to treat them primarily as victims;

(l) Calling upon the Government, without prejudice to children's association or alleged association with armed groups, to issue civil documentation, such as birth certificates and identification cards, so as to enable children to have access to public assistance and basic services, including access to formal schooling, and to identify practical solutions to overcome existing administrative and security barriers; welcoming the Government's special administrative process to register children born of rape and encouraging its deployment, without delay, at the national level;

(m) Expressing grave concern over the allegations of mistreatment of children in detention for association or alleged association with armed groups or on national security charges, and recalling the international obligation of the Government to ensure adherence to the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

(n) Calling upon the Government to fully implement its obligations under legal instruments on anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war, in particular the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling,

Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Protocol V); and also calling upon the Government to continue the promotion and scale-up of the survey and clearance of mines and explosive remnants of war, mine risk reduction and mine risk education, victim assistance and stockpile destruction, including prior to any movement by internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas, in close coordination with and with support from the United Nations and international and regional stakeholders, and welcoming in this regard the close cooperation between the Government of Iraq and the Mine Action Service and implementation of the mine action programme strategy (2020–2023);

(o) Recalling the endorsement by the Government of Iraq of the Safe Schools Declaration in May 2015, and encouraging the Government to implement it and to ensure that attacks on schools and military use of schools in violation of international law are investigated and that those responsible are duly prosecuted, as appropriate, and to take concrete measures to facilitate the continuation of education of Iraqi children, consistent with Security Council resolution 2601 (2021);

(p) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children, and urging the Government to end impunity for violations and abuses against children by ensuring that all such perpetrators, including members of its own security forces and the Popular Mobilization Forces, are brought to justice without undue delay through timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction, and to exclude those found guilty from any government security forces;

(q) Calling upon the Government to ensure that all children, irrespective of their perceived status or affiliation, benefit from humanitarian access without discrimination and according to the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality and independence, including by reducing bureaucratic impediments to access, and that children in detention benefit from specific individualized care and protection, including access to food, to medical, mental health and psychosocial care, and to fundamental rights and services, including international standards of due process, as well as fair trial guarantees;

(r) Inviting the Government to keep the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict informed of its efforts to implement the recommendations of the Working Group and the Secretary-General, as appropriate.

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

(a) Encouraging the Secretary-General to continue to call upon all parties engaged in armed conflict in Iraq to fully respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law and international refugee law, as applicable; and noting the Secretary-General's global call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, as supported in Security Council resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2565 (2021);

(b) Welcoming the efforts of his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, UNAMI, and the United Nations Children's Fund to highlight the plight of children affected by armed conflict in Iraq, and welcoming their efforts to strengthen child protection in Iraq;

(c) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that the country task force on monitoring and reporting in Iraq and other relevant United Nations agencies continue

their engagement and efforts to support the Government of Iraq to address violations and abuses committed against children in Iraq;

(d) Recognizing the importance of the monitoring and reporting of violations and abuses against children, and requesting the Secretary-General to ensure the continued effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on the six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, as established by the Security Council in its resolution 1612 (2005) and further developed in subsequent resolutions, as well as the monitoring of the detention of children for actual or alleged association with armed groups;

(e) Requesting the Secretary-General to continue highlighting the impact on children of the contamination of Iraqi territory by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosives, to ensure that the country task force on monitoring and reporting in Iraq and other relevant United Nations agencies continue their work and engagement in this area, for greater international awareness, adequate funding and support for Iraq in promoting mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance and stockpile destruction;

(f) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure support for the mandate of UNAMI to assist the efforts of the Government of Iraq to strengthen child protection, including the reintegration and rehabilitation of children, to continue to give priority to the child protection capacity of UNAMI and to ensure that information and analysis on the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict are specifically included in his future reports, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions.

Direct action by the Working Group

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

(a) Stressing the critical child protection needs in Iraq, and calling upon the international community to support the Government in implementing national programmes and initiatives to enhance the protection of children and to support monitoring and reporting activities by the United Nations and its partners to inform and identify child protection priorities and enhance child protection programming;

(b) Emphasizing the importance of international support towards enhancing the institutional capabilities of the Government, and in this regard calling upon the World Bank and donors to consider providing flexible, timely and sufficient funding and support to the Government of Iraq towards strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including:

(i) Supporting the implementation of the national child protection policy and sustainable multisectoral release and reintegration programmes, that are gender- and age-sensitive, for all children formerly associated with parties to the conflict, including access to civil documentation, health care, mental health and psychosocial support, and education programmes, as well as raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of these children and facilitate their return, for all children formerly associated with parties to the conflict, emphasizing the importance of socioeconomic reintegration and the need to support viable and sustainable alternative livelihoods in order to prevent the re-recruitment of children;

(ii) Supporting the provision of access to adequate health care, emphasizing the importance of continued investment in service delivery and mental health and psychosocial programmes addressing the needs of children affected by armed conflict;

(iii) Supporting the provision of and access to specialized services for child survivors and victims of sexual violence in armed conflict, including timely and non-discriminatory medical, mental health and psychosocial assistance to child victims, including from ethnic and religious minority groups, of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed in armed conflict;

(iv) Supporting the efforts to address the impact on children of the contamination of Iraqi territory by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, including programmes and initiatives of mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance and stockpile destruction;

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

Annex

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

Madam Chair,

At the outset, I wish to congratulate your Excellency on chairing the Working Group and thank you and the members of the Working Group for the invitation to attend today's meeting. I also would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for presenting the Secretary-General's fourth report on children and armed conflict in Iraq and for all the efforts in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our meeting today, for my Government and me personally as representative of Iraq, as a father, and as human, is of great significance, where we will discuss one of the most critical topics and crises, not only because of the negative and devastating effect on children's lives, the number one priority, but also because of the consequences it brings, in the long run, to the future of the whole country and its people.

Therefore, and in order to address the matter constructively, we need to take a step back, look at the picture as a whole, and consider the situation in the country, facts, and realities on the ground, which I will go over next:

1. The total number of internally displaced persons as at December 2021 is 1.18 million, including over 400,000 children. This massive number is only for people in acute humanitarian need.

2. The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq (para. 9) shows a figure of 5,453 children for the families of Da'esh, and this number is growing over time because Iraq is continuing to fulfil its legal and moral commitments towards the repatriation of all Iraqi nationals detained in Hawl camp in Syria (para. 28), the numbers are not the only fact here, it's the capacity that the Government requires to deal with every single child and his or her particular case, it's the communities and their ability to overcome the recent past and reconcile with their killers, and it's the families of Da'esh needs and their reintegration process back into society. Those children and their families are in the thousands if you compare them to far fewer numbers of foreign fighters' children and families that Iraq and the United Nations spent years negotiating their repatriation because their countries can't deal with them for various reasons.

3. Iraq is one of the most explosive ordnance-contaminated countries in the world. It has approximately 2,850 square kilometres of recorded contaminated areas, including extensive and complex contamination in the areas liberated from Da'esh. The Government is leading and coordinating a national mine action response supported by multi-donor contributions and Mine Action Service-Iraq through support, advisory and technical capacity to the Iraqi national authorities and national operators to lead the implementation of its programme strategy 2020–2023.

4. The issue of humanitarian denial incidents is being considered and addressed on a case-by-case basis. Most of the denials occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result of the confusion on implementing the stay-at-home order and other precautionary measures. The Government reviews the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) authorizations protocols periodically to facilitate their work throughout the country. Still, some NGOs are not legally registered in Iraq or sometimes use local contractors to deliver the goods and services on their behalf using

their authorizations. These are only a few examples of the incidents that could happen daily; stating that, this does not mean that there are no mistakes or illegal denials, and those are being reported and dealt with accordingly. The last item on the matter of the denial is that the Government is working to the best of its ability, considering the challenging and complicated situation on the ground, to live up to its responsibility in vetting and checking the status of every entity that provides any service, in order to protect the recipients' lives and security. Not to mention that sometimes there is a need to protect the humanitarian actors from being caught in an unsafe situation.

5. On the matter of the number of children in detention, there is a historic misunderstanding between Iraq and the United Nations when it comes to the interpretation of the status of the children in some of the holding facilities in Iraq. The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior run all the detention centres in Iraq. The unfortunate thing about this is that the dominant majority of the people working for both Ministries at the children's facilities wear security forces outfits, not civilian ones. Moreover, some of the holding facilities are not fit for children. In light of this, the United Nations team considers that every child is a detainee, and every holding facility is a prison.

Madam Chair,

A significant number of the children in the Ministry of Justice either have no family members any more, or their families don't want to take them in because of their ties to Da'esh, and some of their families are convicted or awaiting trial. On the other hand, Iraq has a serious shortage of children's homes and orphanages simply due to the fact that nobody anticipated these large numbers of children. In collaboration with civil society and private donors, the Government plans to establish new care homes for the children in Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk and Mosul to accommodate the increasing number of orphans and provide the necessary services.

6. On the use of schools for military purposes, Iraq joined the Safe Schools Declaration in 2015, all the security forces have been instructed to leave any building of educational purposes effective immediately since 2015, and the report is being considered for the proper action by the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.

7. Lastly, the action plan and the latest progress. The Iraqi Government finalized its draft of the plan in April 2021 and conveyed, in writing (note verbale No. 458 dated 2 May 2021) and verbally through the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in his last meeting with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative in Iraq, the readiness of the Government to negotiate the final version of the action plan and still didn't receive any reply on the way forward.

Madam Chair,

Lastly, through Your Excellency and the esteemed members of the Working Group, I would like to ask Ms. Gamba to help Iraq's children and the Iraqi Government to fulfil its commitments under international law by sharing the information regarding the following:

1. The exact locations and names of the schools used by the security forces.

2. The locations and dates of the humanitarian denials.

3. The information about the recruited child by the PMF.

Even if that information had been shared with Iraqi authorities before, it would be in the children's best interest to share it as much as it takes to stop the reoccurrence of any violations and hold the perpetrators accountable.

Madam Chair,

Ladies and gentlemen members of the working group,

To conclude, I would like to highlight and reiterate my Government's position and understanding of the matter at hand; children are victims. It is our human, moral and legal obligation to spare no effort to save their lives and future according to our national laws and international commitments.

One last item, I wish, on behalf of my Government, to invite Ms. Gamba to visit Iraq to witness for herself the situation on the ground, meet the Iraqi officials, and visit the children's facilities throughout the country.

Iraq

69. The United Nations verified 288 grave violations against 167 children (131 boys, 32 girls, 4 sex unknown). In addition, 16 grave violations against 16 children (4 boys, 12 girls), which occurred in previous years, were verified in 2021.

70. No cases of the recruitment and use of children were verified during the reporting period. The recruitment and use of one boy by Da'esh (in 2017) was verified in 2021.

71. As at December 2021, 1,267 children (1,251 boys, 16 girls) remained in detention on national security-related charges, for up to five years, including for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, primarily Da'esh.

72. A total of 159 children (127 boys, 28 girls, 4 unknown sex) were killed (72) and maimed (87) by unidentified perpetrators (101), Da'esh (37), Iraqi security forces (12), Operation Claw (6) and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) (3). The majority of incidents occurred in areas previously under the control of Da'esh. Child casualties resulted from explosive remnants of war (127), ground engagement (24), crossfire (1) and air strikes (7). In addition, the killing of two boys in 2017 by unidentified perpetrators was verified in 2021.

73. Rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against 6 girls by Da'esh in 2014 were verified in 2021.

74. Three attacks on schools (1) and hospitals (2) were verified and attributed to Da'esh (2) and Operation Claw (1). A total of 33 instances of the military use of schools by the Iraqi police (25), PMF (4), the Iraqi army (3) and the Peshmerga (1) were verified in Kirkuk (29), Ninawa (3) and in Salah al-Din (1) Governorates.

75. The United Nations verified the abduction of 8 children (4 boys, 4 girls) by Da'esh. In addition, the abduction of 7 children (1 boy, 6 girls) by Da'esh in 2014 was verified in 2021.

76. A total of 118 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access were attributed to Iraqi security forces (89), PMF (16), the Iraqi police (10), Operation Claw (1), national security services (1) and to unidentified perpetrators (1).

Developments and concerns

77. I welcome the absence of cases of the recruitment and use of children attributed to PMF and the engagement between the Government and the United Nations to prevent grave violations, and the progress made towards the development of an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by PMF. I urge the Government to prioritize the adoption and implementation of the action plan. The prompt signature and implementation of the action plan may make PMF eligible for delisting from the annexes to my report on children and armed conflict upon United Nations verification that the terms of the action plan have been fulfilled, including that the violations mentioned therein have ceased, and that measures are in place to prevent their reoccurrence.

78. I am concerned that explosive remnants of war are the leading cause for rising child casualties. I urge the Government to fully implement international legal instruments on mines and explosive remnants of war. I call upon the Government to continue demining, mine risk education and victim assistance, including prior to any movement by internally displaced persons to contaminated areas.

Launched by Türkiye in northern Iraq in May 2019.

79. I am troubled by the increase in the number of children detained on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association with Da'esh. These children should be treated primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards. Children should only be detained as a last resort and for the shortest period of time. I call upon the Government to release these children to child protection actors.

80. I welcome the adoption of the Law on Support to Female Yazidi Survivors. I encourage the Government to address the needs of other minorities, of boys and men who are survivors of Da'esh atrocities and of children born of rape.

81. I commend the Government for the repatriation of 336 Iraqi families, including 858 children, from Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic. I welcome the repatriation of 223 children from Iraq to their countries of origin. I reiterate my call upon all countries concerned to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of children, in line with the principle of non-refoulement, with respect for family unity and the best interests of the child, and in accordance with international law.

82. I encourage the Government to facilitate the reintegration of all children affected by armed conflict, with the support of the United Nations.

83. I reiterate my recommendations from my report on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2022/46).

Israel and the State of Palestine

84. The United Nations verified 2,934 grave violations against 1,208 Palestinian children and 9 Israeli children (915 boys, 302 girls) in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel.

85. The United Nations verified the recruitment of one Palestinian boy by the Mujahidin Brigades in Gaza. In addition, the recruitment and use of one boy by Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in 2019 was verified in 2021. In Gaza, Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigades, Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades and Palestinian Mujahidin Movement Mujahidin Brigades, organized "summer camps" for adults and children as young as 14, exposing them to military content and activities.

86. The United Nations verified the detention of 637 Palestinian children for alleged security offences by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, including 557 in East Jerusalem. Among those children, 85 reported ill-treatment and breaches of due process by Israeli forces while in detention, with 75 per cent reporting having experienced physical violence.

87. A total of 88 children (86 Palestinians, 2 Israelis; 64 boys, 24 girls) were killed in Gaza (69), in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (17) and in Israel (2), by Israeli forces (78), Palestinian armed groups (8), unidentified perpetrators and explosive remnants of war (2). All 17 children in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were killed by Israeli forces using live ammunition mainly during demonstrations (9), and in relation to alleged or attempted attacks on Israeli civilians or forces (7). In Gaza, 59 children were killed by air strikes and 1 by live ammunition by Israeli forces during the escalation of hostilities in May, 6 by rockets fired by Palestinian armed groups, one by Israeli forces during a demonstration at the Israel-Gaza perimeter fence, one by explosive remnants of war and one by unidentified

For the purposes of the present report, the present section provides information on grave violations in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel.

United Nations S/2022/46

Security Council

Distr.: General
26 January 2022

Original: English

Children and armed conflict in Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fourth report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Iraq and covers the period from 1 August 2019 to 30 June 2021.

The report addresses the effects of conflict on children in the country, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations committed against children, and contains information, where available, on perpetrators. It also outlines information on the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through dialogue with parties.

Lastly, the report provides a series of recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in Iraq.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, covers the period from 1 August 2019 to 30 June 2021. It is the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report serves to highlight trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in Iraq, and provides details of the progress made towards ending and preventing such violations since the previous report (S/2019/984) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/AC.51/2020/4). It also contains an outline of the progress and challenges in establishing dialogue with parties to the conflict. Where possible, perpetrators of grave violations are identified. In annex I to the most recent report on children and armed conflict (A/75/873-S/2021/437), Da'esh was identified under section A, on parties that had not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children, as being a party that recruited and used children, that killed and maimed children, that committed rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, that abducted children and that engaged in attacks on schools and hospitals. The Popular Mobilization Forces were listed under section B, on parties that had put in place measures aimed at improving the protection of children, as being a party that recruited and used children.

2. The information contained in the present report was verified by the country task force on monitoring and reporting in Iraq, co-chaired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and related response measures, including restrictions on movement, exacerbated existing challenges in documenting and verifying grave violations against children. Therefore, the information presented in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in Iraq during the reporting period, and the actual number of grave violations is likely to be higher. Where incidents were committed earlier but verified only during the reporting period, that information is qualified as relating to an incident that was verified at a later date.

II. Overview of political and security developments

3. Since the previous report (S/2019/984), the security situation has stabilized across the country; however, Da'esh has continued to conduct frequent asymmetric attacks against civilians and the Iraqi security forces, albeit on a significantly smaller scale.

4. In October 2019, Iraq witnessed large-scale public protests demanding substantial political, economic and social reforms that rapidly spread and escalated, turning violent as protesters attempted to cross into the former International Zone and were met with a forceful response from the Iraqi security forces. Between 1 October 2019 and 26 January 2020, protest-related violence resulted in hundreds of dead and thousands of injured protesters. Although the scale of the demonstrations started to diminish in late 2019, public protests continued throughout the reporting period, albeit on a smaller scale and with reduced levels of violence.

Following the adoption of resolution 75/291 by the General Assembly, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is now referred to as Da'esh in documents originating from the United Nations Secretariat.

5. On 1 December 2019, the Council of Representatives accepted the resignation of the then Prime Minister, Adil Abd Al-Mahdi. On 7 May 2020, the Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, who had been designated to form a Government on 9 April, received a vote of confidence from the Council of Representatives. The government programme was also approved during that legislative session.

6. The outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 exacerbated an already vulnerable protection environment for children, especially for children living in camps and children in detention. The Government took a number of steps to address the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the creation of a crisis cell, on 26 January 2020, tasked with overseeing the implementation of precautionary measures and responses to contain community transmission. Initial measures included a nationwide curfew and a stay-at-home order, the suspension of commercial flights and the closure of land borders, with only essential trade allowed. By June 2021, some measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic remained in place, while efforts continued with a view to encouraging the Iraqi public to enrol for vaccination, after Iraq received its first COVID-19 vaccines in March 2021.

7. In parallel, a strategic dialogue between Iraq and the United States of America was launched on 11 June 2020. The next day, the United States Department of State and the Government of Iraq issued a joint statement in which it was noted that the "discussions covered security and counterterrorism, economics and energy, political issues, and cultural relations". In the statement, the United States noted that "in light of significant progress towards eliminating the [Da'esh] threat, over the coming months the [United States] would continue reducing forces from Iraq".

8. During the reporting period, military operations to counter Da'esh were carried out in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates and to reinforce the border with the Syrian Arab Republic against possible Da'esh incursions.

9. Between October 2020 and March 2021, the closure by the Government of 16 camps for internally displaced people in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Karbala', Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah-al-Din Governorates, as well as the reclassification of two formal camps as informal sites, resulted in the departure of 9,443 households (46,940 persons) from those camps to non-camp settings in Iraq. In early 2021, the Government paused the closure of camps in Iraq, with two formal camps, Nahiyat al-Amiriyah camp in Anbar Governorate and Jad'ah 5 in Ninawa Governorate, remaining open and hosting approximately 26,000 persons, including 5,453 children, many of them families with alleged Da'esh affiliations. In addition, 25 camps for internally displaced persons hosting 184,470 persons, including 86,641 children, remained open under the administration of the Kurdistan Regional Government. On 16 March 2021, the Government's national plan for the return of displaced people and reconstruction was endorsed by the Council of Ministers.

10. The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD), established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), continued to support domestic efforts to hold Da'esh accountable by collecting, preserving and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that could amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by Da'esh in Iraq. On 7 May 2021, UNITAD reported that it had finalized an initial case brief addressing the legal characterization of the crimes committed against the Yazidi community (see S/2021/419). In a briefing on 10 May, the Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD denounced executions, slavery, sexual slavery and crimes against children as horrific and as proof that children were directly and deliberately being targeted by Da'esh. He stressed that Yazidi children were profoundly impacted and announced that the Team had established that there was

"clear and convincing evidence that the crimes against the Yazidi people clearly constituted genocide".

III. Update on the main actors involved in the armed conflict in Iraq

Iraqi security forces

11. The Iraqi security forces include the Iraqi police, under the Ministry of the Interior, and the Iraqi armed forces, including the Iraqi Army, under the Ministry of Defence. Since the Government declared the military defeat of Da'esh in December 2017, the Iraqi security forces have continued to implement a counter-terrorism campaign, including by conducting large-scale clearance operations in areas formerly controlled by Da'esh, defusing improvised explosive devices and exposing Da'esh hideouts, tunnels and weapons caches. Military operations were concentrated in areas where Da'esh remained active, including Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din Governorates.

12. The Popular Mobilization Forces are an integral part of the Iraqi security forces as an independent military formation under the direct command of the Prime Minister. Throughout the reporting period, the Popular Mobilization Forces continued to carry out security operations, sometimes jointly with the Iraqi armed forces, in areas where Da'esh was active.

International coalition to counter Da'esh

13. The international counter-Da'esh coalition, comprising 84 members, committed to, among other things, tackling the financing and economic infrastructure of Da'esh, preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders and supporting the restoration of essential public services in areas retaken from Da'esh.

14. In June 2021, at a ministerial meeting, the coalition members affirmed the continued need to sustain pressure on Da'esh in Iraq and to counter Da'esh global networks through the coalition's five lines of action: stabilizing liberated areas, preventing the movement of foreign terrorist fighters, tackling Da'esh financing, providing political-military consultation, and countering Da'esh messaging efforts. In addition, it addressed the root causes of support for Da'esh "through targeted justice and accountability assistance to local communities and survivors" of atrocities committed by Da'esh.

15. Since March 2020, the international counter-Da'esh coalition has transferred responsibility for several of its bases to the Iraqi security forces in Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk and Ninawa Governorates.

Other actors engaged in the fight against Da'esh

16. The Kurdistan Regional Government's security institutions also engaged in the fight against Da'esh, including the Kurdish Peshmerga (the armed forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government), the Peshmerga Zeravani (the military police) and the Peshmerga Asayish (the internal security forces). Progress continued to be made

Text of the briefing available at un.org/sites/www.unitad.un.org/files/general/sa_khan_6th_briefing_sc_as_delivered_en_0.pdf.
See https://theglobalcoalition.org/en.
United States Department of State, "The Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS", 28 June 2021. Available at www.state.gov/the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis/.

on cooperation between the Iraqi armed forces and the Peshmerga forces in that regard.

17. As noted in the previous report, the Sinjar Resistance Units remained active in the Sinjar district (Ninawa Governorate) and the People's Defence Forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (HPG/PKK) continued to conduct operations in Iraq.

18. Da'esh continued to conduct predominantly small-scale, asymmetric attacks against civilians and the Iraqi security forces. The attacks involved the targeting of infrastructure and livelihoods, including burning crop fields and destroying electricity transmitters, with the aim of limiting stabilization in areas formerly occupied by the group, in particular in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates.

Other actors

19. Throughout the reporting period, the Ministry of Defence of Turkey continued to report military activity, carried out under the name Operation Claw, against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) positions in northern Iraq.

20. In a new development, self-proclaimed, previously unknown armed groups were verified as the perpetrators of grave violations against children during the reporting period. For example, an armed group calling itself the "Companion of the Cave" first came to light when it claimed responsibility for an attack in Baghdad, on 17 November 2020, in which one girl was killed. Similarly, an armed group calling itself the "Guardians of Blood" first appeared when claiming responsibility for an incident of denial of humanitarian access that had occurred in Ninawa, on 26 August 2020. No further claims are known to have been made by those groups.

IV. Grave violations against children

21. During the reporting period, the country task force verified 317 grave violations against 254 children (195 boys, 51 girls, 8 sex unknown), representing a significant decrease compared with the previous report (2,114 grave violations), although the latter covered a four-year period and included the peak period of military operations against Da'esh. The country task force verified violations against 84 children in the second half of 2019, 82 in 2020 and 88 in the first half of 2021. Killing and maiming remained the most verified violation, affecting the largest number of children (249), with explosive remnants of war (121) and improvised explosive devices (46) being the leading causes of child casualties and amounting to 67 per cent of the total number of casualties. Denial of humanitarian access was the second most verified violation, with 62 verified incidents.

22. When perpetrators of grave violations could be identified, most violations were attributed to Da'esh (65). Additional violations were attributed to the Iraqi security forces (58), the Popular Mobilization Forces (10), Operation Claw (8), the Companions of the Cave (1) and the Guardians of Blood (1). The majority of grave violations (238) were verified in areas previously under Da'esh control, including Kirkuk (96), Salah al-Din (52), Ninawa (52), Diyala (42), Anbar (19) Governorates, followed by Muthanna (12), Basrah (11) and Baghdad (10) Governorates, among others.

23. While still being the main violation verified during the reporting period, the killing and maiming of children was at the lowest verified level since the start of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in Iraq in 2009. This could be linked to progress made in countering Da'esh. The majority of child casualties (174) could not be attributed to a specific perpetrator, as the contamination of areas with explosive

remnants of war left behind from decades of conflict, which resulted in 167 child casualties, remained of serious concern.

24. In addition, 39 grave violations against children that had occurred in previous reporting periods were late-verified during the period under review by the country task force. Those violations included abductions (21), rape and other forms of sexual violence (12), recruitment and use (1) and killing and maiming (5), and were attributed to Da'esh (36) and the international counter-Da'esh coalition (3). The violations affected 26 children (9 boys, 17 girls), of whom 13 children (1 boy, 12 girls) were affected by multiple violations, with abduction and sexual violence being the most prevalent double violations. Twelve of those incidents involved girls who had been abducted in separate incidents in August 2014, when Da'esh launched deadly attacks against communities living in Sinjar district (Ninawa Governorate). All those girls had been abducted and taken to locations outside Iraq and had been victims of multiple forms of sexual violence.

A. Recruitment and use

25. The recruitment and use of children (1) has decreased considerably since the previous report (296). The country task force verified the recruitment and use of one boy by the Popular Mobilization Forces. The 15-year-old boy was the victim of two violations: he was recruited, in 2018, and later killed, in May 2020, while being used by the Popular Mobilization Forces in a military operation. The country task force also late-verified the recruitment and use by Da'esh of one Yazidi boy, who was 3 years old at the time of the incident in 2015. Despite his young age, the boy was taken to the Syrian Arab Republic and trained in the use of weapons in a manner consistent with the recruitment methods of Da'esh. In 2017, the child managed to escape and was later reunited with his family in Iraq.

26. In addition, the country task force received allegations of the recruitment and use of 29 children between 2018 and 2020 in Sinjar (Ninawa Governorate); however, the allegations could not be verified.

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

27. A total of 1,091 children (1,048 boys, 43 girls) were held in detention by Iraqi security forces on national-security-related charges, including for their alleged association with armed groups, primarily Da'esh, compared with 778 children at the end of June 2019. As at June 2021, 35 of those children were of foreign origin. Most of the detained children were boys aged between 15 and 18 years; some children were as young as 9 years old. Children detained on such charges continued to face challenges in gaining access to legal, social and other services, with instances of prolonged pretrial detention and of mistreatment being reported. In some cases, children were held with adult detainees.

28. The country task force continued to engage with countries of origin for the repatriation of foreign children in Iraq. A total of 627 children (313 boys, 314 girls) were repatriated from Iraq to their countries of origin. Separately, in May 2021, the Government of Iraq conducted an initial repatriation to Iraq of Iraqi families from the Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic, representing 382 individuals, including 245 children (121 boys, 124 girls).

B. Killing and maiming

29. The country task force verified the killing (98) and maiming (151) of 249 children (193 boys, 48 girls, 8 sex unknown), 82 of whom were killed or maimed in the second half of 2019, 79 in 2020 and 88 in the first half of 2021. There was a significant decrease in the numbers of children killed or maimed (249) in comparison with the previous report (1,722), owing to a conflict of lower intensity and an improved security situation.

30. Incidents of the killing and maiming of children were attributed to Da'esh (61), followed by Operation Claw (7), the Iraqi security forces (6), the Companions of the Cave (1) and unidentified perpetrators (174). Some 78 per cent of all child casualties were verified in areas previously under Da'esh control and where Da'esh remained active, with most instances being verified in Kirkuk (63), followed by Salah al-Din (49), Ninawa (38), Diyala (34) and Anbar (11) Governorates, as well as Muthanna (12), Baghdad (10), Basrah (11) and Karbala' (4).

31. Of the total number of child casualties, 67 per cent (167) were caused by explosive remnants of war (121) and improvised explosive devices (46) left over from previous conflicts. The predominantly affected areas were locations that had previously been under Da'esh control. In most cases, children were harmed while herding livestock in the surrounding areas of villages or while playing, by accidentally triggering the devices when they picked them up or stepped on them. For example, in December 2019, five boys aged between 6 and 7 years were killed while playing outside a primary school, in Salah al-Din Governorate, when they touched a device, causing it to explode.

32. Ground engagements (74) and airstrikes (8) were the second and third main causes of child casualties, with most incidents being verified in northern Iraqi governorates and attributed to Da'esh (61), Operation Claw (7), the Iraqi security forces (6), the Companion of the Cave (1) and unidentified perpetrators (7). For instance, in October 2020, five children (four boys, one girl) were maimed by shrapnel after missiles were launched by Da'esh in Jalawla' district (Diyala Governorate). In addition, five child casualties were late-verified and attributed to the international counter-Da'esh coalition (3) and to Da'esh (2).

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

33. Incidents of sexual violence against children continued to be underreported, with none verified by the country task force as having occurred during the reporting period.

34. The United Nations late-verified 12 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against Yazidi girls that had been committed by Da'esh in August 2014 in Sinjar district (Ninawa Governorate). With the support of Iraqi civil society and the Iraqi security forces, the survivors, who had been taken out of Iraq, returned to the country during the reporting period, with nine girls returning in 2020 and three girls in the first half of 2021. Where possible, survivors were reunited with family members, receiving case management and psychosocial support, referrals to health services and access to livelihood services to support the reintegration process.

35. It should be noted that gender restrictive norms and practices significantly hamper access to services, including legal services, by survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence. The situation is compounded by stigmatization and fear of retaliation, rendering survivors even more vulnerable should they decide to report such violations. For instance, concerns remained about displaced girls living in formal

and informal camp settings who were vulnerable to sexual violence owing to the confined living conditions, restrictions on movement and the lack of access to services, civil documentation and livelihoods. Since March 2020, COVID-19-related restrictions on movement have further exacerbated a dire protection situation for internally displaced persons, increasing their vulnerability to negative coping mechanisms, including the early and forced marriage of girls.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

36. The country task force verified no attacks on schools and one attack on a health centre. On 26 May 2020, a day-care health centre (primary health-care unit) was partially destroyed in Safr, Mawat district (Sulaymaniyah Governorate) during Operation Claw. The attack took place at night and no civilians were injured as a result of the operation. As at June 2021, the day-care centre remained non-functional.

Military use of schools

37. The country task force verified the military use of 45 schools – 4 during the second half of 2019, 27 in 2020 and 14 during the first half of 2021 – by the Iraqi police (35), the Iraqi Army (6), the Popular Mobilization Forces (3) and the Peshmerga (1). All the schools were located in areas previously under Da'esh control: 37 schools in Kirkuk, 4 in Ninawa and 4 in Salah al-Din Governorates. By June 2021, nine schools had been vacated by the Iraqi police (8) in Kirkuk and the Popular Mobilization Forces (1) in Ninawa, while 36 schools continued to be used by the Iraqi police (27), the Iraqi armed forces (7), the Popular Mobilization Forces (1) and the Peshmerga (1).

E. Abduction

38. The country task force verified the abduction of four children (one boy, three girls), one of whom had been abducted in 2019 in Kirkuk and three (one boy, two girls) had been abducted in 2020 in Salah al-Din (1) and Diyala (2) Governorates. All those abductions were attributed to Da'esh. In May 2020, Da'esh elements entered the house of the mukhtar (mayor) in Samarra' district (Salah al-Din Governorate) and abducted a 15-year-old boy after killing three men and injuring one woman. The boy was released shortly afterwards.

39. In addition, the country task force late-verified the abduction of 21 children (7 boys, 14 girls), with 18 of those abductions (6 boys, 12 girls) occurring between 2014 and 2016. All the abductions were attributed to Da'esh. Of those children, 12 were victims of at least one additional violation during the time of their abduction, with rape and other forms of sexual violence against 10 girls, while recruitment and use affected 2 boys. For example, four children (one boy, three girls) were abducted by Da'esh in August 2014 in Sinjar district (Ninawa Governorate), with the youngest victim just 3 years old at the time of his abduction.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

40. The country task force verified 62 incidents of denial of humanitarian access: 1 incident in 2020 and 61 in the first half of 2021. The incidents were attributed to the Iraqi security forces (52), the Popular Mobilization Forces (9) and the Guardians of Blood (1) and were verified in Kirkuk (32), Ninawa (14), Anbar (8), Diyala (6) and Salah al-Din (2).

41. The lack of a unified authorization mechanism for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) hampered the movements, activities and operations of humanitarian actors throughout the reporting period. From the end of 2019 to October 2020, the Government suspended the national mechanism responsible for authorizing access for NGOs, thereby increasing bureaucratic impediments and effectively limiting humanitarian operations. In November 2020, it launched a new online national access authorization mechanism for NGOs, which has contributed to overcoming the long-standing problems of obtaining access letters. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the restrictions on humanitarian access. As a result, until mid-2020, there were delays in delivering humanitarian assistance to more than 850,000 internally displaced persons living in or outside of camps, including approximately 385,000 Iraqi children in need of assistance.

42. Some 87 per cent of the denials of humanitarian access (54) in the first half of 2021 were concentrated in three Governorates: Kirkuk (32), Ninawa (14) and Anbar (8). All such incidents occurring during that period related to bureaucratic restrictions, attributed to the Iraqi security forces (52) and the Popular Mobilization Forces (9), which limited or slowed down the movement of humanitarian personnel and goods, thereby hampering humanitarian operations. There were also instances of denial of passage at checkpoints. For example, in Kirkuk Governorate, 32 incidents involved members of the Iraqi security forces at checkpoints in Hawijah district not recognizing Government-delivered access authorizations and demanding that NGOs obtain local permits.

V. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children

43. The United Nations continued to engage with the Government of Iraq to strengthen the protection of children as well as for the purpose of finalizing and adopting an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. It is also envisioned that the draft action plan will provide support for the reintegration of children who have been released from armed actors. Discussions are ongoing on the draft action plan, which will also strengthen the existing national child protection framework.

44. The interministerial committee on grave violations of the rights of the child, created in November 2017, remained active, albeit to a limited extent owing to the political, security and COVID-19-related situation. Its responsibilities included awareness-raising, building the capacities of parties to the conflict on child protection, supporting legal reform processes and documenting grave violations against children. The committee fully resumed its work in April 2021.

45. The country task force continued to support the Federal Government as well as the Kurdistan Regional Government to harmonize domestic legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties to which Iraq is a party. In June 2021, after its endorsement by the Council of Ministers of Iraq, a bill on child protection, in which the involvement of children in armed conflict is criminalized, was submitted to the Council of Representatives of Iraq for its first reading. Similarly, during the same period, the draft child rights act for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, criminalizing the recruitment or conscription of children under the age of 18 into military or paramilitary services or armed groups in combat and support roles, was finalized and validated for submission to the Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government for its endorsement and subsequent submission to the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region. A child protection policy for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in which the services and capacities for protection of children from

violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect are specified, is awaiting the endorsement of the Council of Ministers.

46. On 1 March 2021, the Council of Representatives of Iraq passed the Yazidi Female Survivors Law, thereby creating a reparation and rehabilitation framework for women and girl survivors of Da'esh crimes from Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak and Christian minority groups. Under the Law, the crimes committed by Da'esh against these women and girls have been recognized as crimes against humanity and genocide, and future amnesties have been excluded. Some gaps remain, however, including the need to expand the definition of survivor to include men and boys, as well as other minority communities. In addition, the Law does not address the status of children born of rape by members of Da'esh.

47. The country task force supported the provision of juvenile justice services for children in conflict with the law, including children in detention for alleged association with parties to the conflict, including Da'esh. Services provided included specialized legal aid for children, advocacy on alternatives to detention, access to psychosocial support and aftercare reintegration.

48. The country task force supported the Government, the Supreme Judicial Council and countries of origin to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of foreign children detained in Iraq for their alleged affiliation with Da'esh. Support was provided to the Government of Iraq and to countries of origin to ensure that repatriation activities adhered to the principle of the best interests of the child and to develop specialized child protection programmes aimed at facilitating the children's full reintegration. Between August 2019 and June 2021, 625 children (312 boys, 313 girls) were repatriated to eight countries. The COVID-19 pandemic halted repatriation activities between March 2020 and February 2021, as Iraqi airspace had closed and restrictions on travel and movement had come into effect. This had a notable impact on children who had to spend another year in detention in Iraq. In March 2021, the repatriation of children to their countries of origin resumed, with 156 children (83 boys, 73 girls) being returned to two countries.

49. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country task force advocated the release of children from detention, including pretrial detention, to reduce overcrowding in detention facilities and to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Since March 2020, the Government has released 767 Iraqi children (701 boys, 66 girls) from detention, among them 48 boys convicted of security-related charges, including an alleged association with Da'esh.

50. The country task force provided training on child protection to international and national NGOs in order to strengthen the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children. The task force held five training sessions for 144 participants (80 men, 64 women) of the Iraqi national child protection network, which included representatives of civil society and national and international NGOs. In addition, the task force collaborated with the international NGO Justice Rapid Response, which provided a four-month training programme for 24 members of the task force (11 of them women), thereby reinforcing its peer network on strengthening the child protection framework in Iraq.

51. The country task force continued to partner with local organizations to support the reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to the conflict and children at risk through a community-based reintegration and security programme. The programme reached 658 children and adolescents (630 boys, 28 girls) in Najaf, Karbala', Ninawa and Kirkuk Governorates. Reintegration and social cohesion activities included mental health and psychological services, legal advice and consultation, and facilitating access to education, vocational training, life skills and case management support.

52. More than 711,390 persons, including 504,068 children (264,095 boys, 239,973 girls) received explosive risk ordinance education through in-person and remote information sessions.

VI. Observations and recommendations

53. I am encouraged by the overall decrease in grave violations against children in Iraq since my previous report, in particular the significant decrease in the recruitment and use as well as the abduction of children, and in attacks on schools and hospitals.

54. I remain concerned, however, that grave violations against children continue to be committed. I call upon all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law and to immediately end and prevent grave violations in Iraq.

55. I am particularly concerned about the continuing incidents of killing and maiming of children, notwithstanding a decrease in their number, and about the impact on children of the contamination of Iraqi territory by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, which are the leading cause of child casualties. I urge all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and better protect children, including in the conduct of military operations and from the risks and effects of explosive remnants of war and the use of explosive weapons, including in populated areas. I call upon the Government of Iraq to fully implement international legal instruments on anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, particularly the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Protocol V). I further call upon the Government to continue promoting mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance and stockpile destruction, including prior to any movement of internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas. The United Nations will continue to support the Iraqi authorities in this regard.

56. I am troubled by the significant increase in the number of children detained by Iraqi security forces on national-security-related charges, including for their alleged association with armed groups, primarily Da'esh. I call upon the Government of Iraq to release children held on such grounds. I reiterate that children formerly associated with armed forces and groups should be treated primarily as victims and that alternatives to detention should be pursued in accordance with international law and in line with international standards on juvenile justice. I call upon the Government to continue to engage with the United Nations in this regard and to provide child protection actors with access to the children concerned.

57. When children are suspected of having committed criminal acts, I reiterate that due process and fair trial standards must be adhered to, with appropriate consideration given to age and gender. Any prosecution of children should respect internationally recognized standards of juvenile justice. I further call upon the Government of Iraq to establish the minimum age of criminal responsibility, in line with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

58. I welcome the collaboration of the Government of Iraq with the United Nations to strengthen the protection of children and the ongoing dialogue on an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. I encourage the Government of Iraq to expedite the adoption of the action plan.

59. I commend the Government's efforts to address the needs of the survivors of atrocities committed by Da'esh and welcome the passing of the Yazidi Female Survivors Law. I encourage the Government to continue engaging with the United Nations on the implementation of the Law, including by ensuring a survivor-centred approach and by paying particular attention to the needs of children. I further encourage the Government to consider similar provisions to address the needs of other minorities and of boy and men survivors of Da'esh atrocities.

60. I welcome the steps taken by the Government and the progress made concerning the bill on the protection of children in Iraq, under which the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict will be criminalized in line with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which has been ratified by Iraq, and I call for the bill's swift adoption. In addition, I note that a child rights act is being drafted for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, pursuant to which the recruitment or conscription of children under the age of 18 will be criminalized, and I encourage its quick enactment.

61. I commend the Government of Iraq for the initial repatriation of Iraqi families, including 245 children, from Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic, and I am encouraged by the increasing number of children repatriated from Iraq to their countries of origin, as well as by the progress made in developing specialized child protection programmes to address children's specific needs and to ensure their full reintegration. I reiterate my call upon all concerned countries of origin that have not yet done so to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of their children, consistent with the principle of non-refoulement and with respect for family unity and the best interests of the child. I urge States Members of the United Nations to continue to search for solutions towards the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of children, including those with alleged links to Da'esh and other groups designated as terrorist by the United Nations, being held in camps or detained in Iraq, under the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees, adopted in 2020.

62. I call upon all parties to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access in order to provide assistance to children and to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and assets.

63. I call upon the Government to develop and implement a national reintegration programme for children affected by armed conflict, with the support of the United Nations and other actors.

64. I welcome the contributions of donors in support of the United Nations and the Government in implementing national programmes to enhance the protection of children in Iraq. I call upon the donor community to reinforce its efforts to provide additional financial support, in particular for explosive risk ordnance education and reintegration programmes for children, as well as to continue to support United Nations access to decontamination efforts and ammunition management efforts.

(1)). Children were abducted for purposes of recruitment (273), sexual violence (88) and ransom (4) and for unknown reasons (95). Most abductions occurred in North Kivu (270), Ituri (94) and South Kivu (42). Separately, 52 children abducted in 2017 by the Bana Mura in Kasai province were returned to their families following United Nations advocacy. In addition, the abduction of 374 children (296 boys, 78 girls) by armed groups (370), including Mai-Mai Mazembe (71), Nyatura (55), Bana Mura (52) and Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (48), and by State forces, namely the armed forces (3) and the national police (1), were verified at a later date.

56. Three incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified and attributed to the armed forces, Mai-Mai Yakotumba and Mai-Mai Mazembe (1 each).

Developments and concerns

57. The armed forces continued to screen new recruits, separating 53 children before enrolment. I commend the Government for its continuing efforts to sustainably prevent child recruitment and use by its forces. I call upon the Government to durably address sexual violence against children, by implementing the 2012 action plan and prioritizing access to services for survivors.

58. I welcome the conviction of the former leader of Nduma défense du Congo, Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, for war crimes, including child recruitment and use. The conviction of 17 soldiers of the armed forces and 11 police officers for the rape of children and the trials of suspected child recruiters are positive developments. I commend the Government for its efforts to hold perpetrators of grave violations accountable and urge them to continue to do so.

59. The signature of seven new commitments by commanders to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations, following United Nations engagement, is encouraging. As a result of similar commitments, 838 children were released in 2020. I encourage remaining armed groups to engage with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children.

60. The separation of 2,101 children is a positive development. I urge the Government to facilitate access of child protection actors to demobilization sites to separate children. I call upon the Government to approve, fund and implement a national community-based disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. I appeal to the donor community to support the reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to conflict.

61. Despite a noted decrease, I am gravely concerned by the persistent prevalence of violations, particularly the recruitment and use, abduction and sexual violence against children, and the increased attacks on schools. I call upon all parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children.

62. I reiterate the recommendations from my report on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2020/1030).

Iraq

63. The United Nations verified 85 grave violations against 82 children (62 boys, 19 girls, 1 sex unknown) that occurred during the reporting period. In addition, 32 grave violations against 22 children (8 boys, 14 girls) that occurred in the previous reporting period were verified at a later date.

64. The recruitment and use of one boy by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) was verified. The boy was recruited in 2018, used, and killed in a military operation in May 2020. In addition, the recruitment and use of a boy by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2015 was verified at a later date.

65. As at 31 December, 1,114 children (1,071 boys, 43 girls) remained in detention on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, primarily ISIL.

66. A total of 79 children (61 boys, 17 girls, 1 sex unknown) were killed (24) and maimed (55) by ISIL (36), Operation Claw (2), Companions of the Cave (1) and unidentified perpetrators (40). Some 65 incidents took place in areas previously under ISIL control, and 25 casualties were caused by indirect attacks or crossfire, 17 by improvised explosive devices and 17 by explosive remnants of war. In addition, the killing (4) and maiming (2) of six children (3 boys, 3 girls) that took place in 2016 and 2017 in Mosul (Ninawa) was verified at a later date and attributed to ISIL (3) and the international counter-ISIL coalition (3).

67. Incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence against nine girls by ISIL that took place in 2014 were verified at a later date.

68. The United Nations verified an Operation Claw air strike in Sulaymaniyah Governorate that hit a health centre. A total of 27 instances of military use of schools by the Iraqi police (22), the Peshmerga (1) and the Iraqi Army (4) were verified.

69. The United Nations verified the abduction of three children (1 boy, 2 girls) by ISIL. In addition, the abduction of 16 children (5 boys, 11 girls) attributed to ISIL that occurred between 2014 and 2016 was verified at a later date.

70. One incident of denial of humanitarian access was verified in 2020, claimed by the Guardians of Blood.

Developments and concerns

71. I welcome the decrease in cases of recruitment and use of children attributed to PMF and the ongoing engagement between the Government and the United Nations to develop an action plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by PMF. I urge the Government to speedily agree to and sign the action plan. I encourage the Interministerial Committee on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Child Rights Violations to resume consultations with the United Nations.

72. I remain deeply concerned at the ongoing killing and maiming of children by landmines and explosive remnants of war. I urge the Government to implement international legal instruments on landmines and explosive remnants of war and to promote mine clearance and mine risk education, including prior to any movement by internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas.

73. I remain concerned about the situation of children detained on national security-related charges, including for their alleged association with armed groups, and recall that children should be treated primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards. The detention of children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, with respect for due process. The United Nations is committed to supporting the Government in the reintegration of children actually or allegedly associated with parties to conflict. I welcome the reintegration of 355 children (259 boys, 96 girls) through United Nations-supported programmes, in coordination with the Government, and urge the Government to develop and implement a national reintegration programme for children affected by armed conflict.

74. I commend the Government for its efforts to release 194 children (95 girls) allegedly affiliated with ISIL and to facilitate their return to their countries of origin.

Launched by Turkey in northern Iraq in May 2019.
Ashab al-Kahf, an armed group.

I call upon all countries concerned to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of their children, in line with the principle of non-refoulement, with respect for family unity and the best interests of the children, and in accordance with international law.

Israel and the State of Palestine

75. The United Nations verified 1,031 grave violations against 340 Palestinian and 3 Israeli children (327 boys, 13 girls) in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel. In addition, 96 grave violations against 96 children (92 boys, 4 girls) which occurred in previous years were verified at later date.

76. The United Nations verified the recruitment of two Palestinian boys by Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades in Gaza.

77. The United Nations verified the detention of 361 Palestinian children for alleged security offences by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (361, including 283 in East Jerusalem). Eighty-seven children reported ill-treatment and breaches of due process by Israeli forces while in detention, with 83 per cent reporting physical violence.

78. Twelve children (11 Palestinian boys, 1 Israeli boy) were killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (9), in Gaza (2) and in Israel (1) by Israeli forces (8), Palestinian security forces (1), Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades (1), unidentified perpetrator (1) and explosive remnants of war (1). Of the eight Palestinian children killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, seven were killed by Israeli forces by live ammunition (6) and physical assault during arrest (1), during law enforcement operations (3), demonstrations and confrontations involving stone throwing (2) and Molotov cocktails (1), and a shooting attack against Israeli forces (1). The child killed by Palestinian security forces was shot with live ammunition in a law enforcement operation. One Israeli boy was killed in the occupied West Bank while being pursued by Israeli police after allegedly throwing stones at Palestinians.

79. A total of 326 children (324 Palestinian children, 2 Israeli children; 313 boys, 13 girls) were maimed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (304), and in Gaza (22) by Israeli forces (294), Israeli settlers (20), Palestinian armed groups (2) and unidentified Palestinian perpetrators (2) and explosive remnants of war (8). The main causes of maiming of children by Israeli forces were tear gas inhalation (170), rubber-coated metal bullets and sponge-tipped bullets (70) and live ammunition (34). Eight children were maimed by Israeli forces during demonstrations at the Israel-Gaza perimeter fence. In Gaza, six Palestinian children were maimed during air strikes by Israeli forces on Gaza, and two Palestinian boys were maimed by a rocket fired by a Palestinian armed group landing near their home. Separately, the maiming of another 96 children (92 boys, 4 girls) by Israeli forces that occurred during demonstrations in Gaza in 2018 and 2019 was verified at a later date. Two Israeli children were maimed in stone-throwing incidents attributed to Palestinian perpetrators.

80. The United Nations verified 30 attacks on schools (11) and hospitals (19), including on protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals, attributed to Israeli forces (26) and Israeli settlers (4) in Gaza (4) and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (26). Incidents involved air strikes (4), settler attacks (1), attacks on medical personnel (18) and threats against teachers or students (7). The United Nations verified one incident of a school being used for military purposes in

For the purposes of the present report, the present section provides information on grave violations in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel.
Any action that causes a serious, permanent, disabling injury, scarring or mutilation to a child.

Developments and concerns

64. I welcome the Government's continued efforts to prevent child recruitment and use. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to screen new recruits and 141 children were identified and separated before enrolment. I commend the sentencing of two commanders of Coalition des patriotes résistants congolais and Nyatura armed groups, including for the recruitment and use of children, and the ongoing trials of commanders of Nduma défense du Congo, FRPI and Nyatura for child recruitment. I call upon the Government to pursue accountability efforts.

65. I am encouraged that the demobilization and surrender of several armed groups allowed for the release of children. I urge the Government to facilitate the access of child protection actors to all pre-cantonment and demobilization sites in order to separate children. The Government must guarantee that all surrendered combatants and their dependants, including children, are treated with dignity and receive support, including health care and nutrition, when hosted in camps under its care.

66. I welcome the engagement of armed groups with the United Nations to end and prevent child recruitment and other grave violations, with 21 new commanders signing commitments to protect children and the release of 920 children. I urge these armed groups, notably Kamuina Nsapu, Mai-Mai Mazembe, Raia Mutomboki and Nyatura, to expeditiously release any remaining children from their ranks and end other violations, and for other groups to engage with the United Nations.

67. I am concerned at the persistent high number of cases of sexual violence perpetrated by government forces. I urge the Government to continue to prioritize prevention and to continue its accountability efforts, and to continue providing medical support to survivors and expediting the implementation of its 2012 action plan and other commitments to end sexual violence.

Iraq

68. The United Nations verified 186 grave violations affecting 184 children (133 boys, 42 girls, 9 sex unknown).

69. Four boys were recruited and used by the Iraqi Security Forces (3), and by the Popular Mobilization Forces (1) in 2016, which was verified at a later date.

70. As at 31 December, 984 children (947 boys, 37 girls), some as young as 9, were detained on national security-related charges, including for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, primarily Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

71. A total of 141 children were killed (61) and maimed (80) by ISIL (68), the Iraqi police (11), Iraqi Security Forces (5) and Operation Claw (3), while responsibility for 54 casualties could not be attributed. Almost half of the casualties (67) were caused by explosive remnants of war in areas previously under ISIL control; most such casualties were attributed to ISIL (36), while the remainder were unattributed (31). In addition, 32 casualties resulted from the use of improvised explosive devices, with 12 of the casualties attributed to ISIL and the perpetrators of the others unknown. Indirect attacks or crossfire incidents resulted in the killing of 15 children and the maiming of 13 children. Among those casualties, 16 were attributed to ISIL, 5 to the Iraqi police, 5 to the Iraqi Security Forces, and 2 casualties were unattributed. A total of 14 children were killed (12) and maimed (2) in targeted attacks. Four of those casualties were attributed to ISIL, six to the Iraqi police, three to Operation Claw, and one remained unattributed.

Turkey launched "Operation Claw" in northern Iraq, in May 2019.

72. Incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, which affected three girls and took place in 2014, were attributed to ISIL and were verified at a later date.

73. Two attacks, on a school and a hospital (1 each) resulted from the use of improvised explosive devices, and both remain unattributed. Four incidents of the military use of schools by the Popular Mobilization Forces were verified.

74. The abduction of 36 children was attributed to ISIL, including the late verification of 34 children between the ages of 6 and 13 (33 boys, 1 girl) who had been abducted between 2014 and 2018.

75. While no incident of the denial of humanitarian access was verified in 2019, humanitarian actors faced bureaucratic impediments and restrictions of movement.

Developments and concerns

76. I commend the Government of Iraq for its ongoing discussion with the United Nations on developing an action plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces, the implementation of which the United Nations is ready to support. I note that no new cases of recruitment and use by those Forces have been documented since 2016.

77. I note the finalization of a national child protection policy in December 2017 and call for its implementation. I urge the Government to adopt a comprehensive law on the rights of the child to criminalize the recruitment of individuals below the age of 18 and establishing the minimum age of criminal responsibility, in line with international juvenile justice standards.

78. I remain deeply concerned about the situation of children detained on security-related charges. Children must be treated primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards. Detention should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time, with respect for due process. The United Nations is committed to supporting the Government in the reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to conflict within its mandate. I welcome the provision of reintegration programming by the Government, with United Nations support, for 100 boys separated from parties to conflict and urge the Government to develop and implement a national reintegration programme for children affected by armed conflict.

79. I welcome the efforts of the Government to facilitate the return of children actually or allegedly associated with ISIL, and call upon all countries concerned to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of these children, in line with international law principles, including the principle of non-refoulement and with respect for the best interests of the child, and I commend those countries that have begun the voluntary repatriation of children.

80. I am concerned by the ongoing killing and maiming of children caused by landmines and explosive remnants of war. I urge the Government to fully implement international legal instruments on anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, and to promote mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance and stockpile destruction.

81. I reiterate the recommendations included in my third report on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2019/984).

Israel and the State of Palestine

82. The United Nations verified 3,908 violations against 1,565 Palestinian and 6 Israeli children (1,486 boys, 85 girls).