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Public Statement by Chair of Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, in connection with the examination of the second report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria (S/2020/652), agreed to convey the following messages through a public statement by the Chair of the Working Group:

To all parties to the armed conflict

- Strongly condemning all violations and abuses committed against children by all parties to the conflict in Nigeria and neighbouring countries affected by the actions of Boko Haram, expressing grave concern at the disproportionate negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, and urging all parties to the conflict to immediately end and prevent all violations of applicable international law involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access and to comply with their obligations under international law;
- Noting with concern that access restrictions to conflict-affected areas during the reporting period presented challenges to the verification of the six grave violations against children and that the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria (S/2020/652) therefore does not reflect the full impact of armed conflict on children in Nigeria;
- Calling upon the parties to further implement the previous conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Nigeria (www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2017/5);
- Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict, stressing that all perpetrators of the six grave violations must be brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay, including through timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction, and to ensure that all victims have access to justice and to the medical and support services that they need;
- Expressing deep concern and condemnation of the continued recruitment and use of children, commending both the Government of Nigeria and CJTF for the constructive role that they have played in the adoption and implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by CJTF, including by facilitating the disengagement of 2,203 boys and girls, strongly urging all parties to the armed conflict, including Boko Haram, to immediately and without preconditions release all children associated with them and end and prevent further recruitment and use of children, and further calling upon the

Government of Nigeria to end and prevent the use of children to carry out menial jobs in some of its armed forces bases;

- Expressing grave concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their or their parents' association or alleged association with Boko Haram, while noting the release by the Nigerian authorities of 1,591 children from detention; and emphasizing that children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts should be treated primarily as victims, and urging the Government of Nigeria to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict;
- Expressing deep concern at the high number of children killed or maimed, as a result of suicide attacks by Boko Haram, many of which were conducted by children, the majority of whom were girls, used as carriers of improvised explosive devices, as a direct or indirect result of hostilities between parties to the armed conflict and of incidents of indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including those involving aerial bombardment, crossfire, gunshots and unexploded ordnance, and calling upon all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined therein;
- Expressing grave concern about the high number of incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children, including displaced children, 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 by members of their respective groups or forces, and stressing the importance of accountability for those who commit sexual violence against children; underscoring that girls continued to be deliberately targeted by rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and forced marriage; noting with concern the difficulty to track, document and verify such violations and abuses owing to a lack of safe reporting mechanisms, survivors' fear of stigma and retaliatory attacks, and lack of access to some conflict-affected areas by the country task force, resulting in an underreporting of the prevalence of cases of sexual violence against children that may have occurred in north-east Nigeria;
- Strongly condemning attacks on schools and hospitals, the overwhelming majority of which was attributed to Boko Haram; calling upon all parties to the armed conflict to comply with applicable international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals as such, including their personnel, and to end and prevent disproportionate or indiscriminate 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, as guided by the Safe Schools Declaration, which was endorsed by the Government of Nigeria in May 2015; noting further the negative effect that attacks on schools and their use can have on the enjoyment of the right to education;
- Expressing particular concern that many children in armed conflict, in particular girls, lack access to education owing to among others attacks against schools;
- Strongly condemning the abduction of children, mostly girls, in particular by Boko Haram, including for recruitment and use, and forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence; urging relevant parties, in particular Boko Haram, to immediately cease the abduction of children and all violations and abuses committed against abducted children, including forced marriage of girls to its fighters, and to immediately release without preconditions all abducted children to relevant civilian child protection actors;
- Expressing grave concern at incidents of denial of humanitarian access, including attacks on, abduction and killing of as well as threats thereof to humanitarian personnel, and calling upon all parties to the

conflict to allow and facilitate, in accordance with international law, including applicable international humanitarian law, safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access, consistent with United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance, including humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, to respect the exclusively humanitarian nature and impartiality of humanitarian aid and to respect the work of all United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners without adverse distinction;

To the Government of Nigeria

- Stressing the primary role of the Government in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict in Nigeria, and recalling that Nigeria is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict;
- Noting with appreciation the Government of Nigeria's acknowledgement of the need to promote accountability and bring justice to victims through its national legislation; and urging to it to pursue its efforts towards accountability, including through comprehensive, independent, timely and systematic investigation, and, as appropriate, prosecution, conviction and punishment of anyone found to be responsible for the six grave violations against children and to ensure that all victims have access to justice as well as to the medical, psychosocial and support services that they need with the best interests of the child as a primary consideration;
- Expressing grave concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their or their parents' association or alleged association with Boko Haram, while noting the release by the Nigerian authorities of 1,591 children from detention; urging the Government of Nigeria to immediately release children held in detention and calling upon it to expedite the review and adoption of the protocol for the handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors; and emphasizes that children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts should be treated primarily as victims; urging the Government of Nigeria to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular that the arrest, detention and imprisonment of children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in line with international law and that in actions concerning children the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration, and calling upon the Government of Nigeria to prioritize their reintegration through family- and community-based reintegration programmes; further calling upon the Government of Nigeria to provide unhindered access to the United Nations to detention facilities; encouraging access for civilian child protection actors to children deprived of liberty for association with armed forces and armed groups;
- Welcoming the Government of Nigeria's cooperation with the country task force towards a handover protocol to facilitate the release and handover of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors and urging it to expedite the adoption and ensure the implementation of the protocol;
- Welcoming the efforts of the Government of Nigeria leading to the release of abducted children, as well as its efforts, with the support of the United Nations and partners, leading to the reintegration of 3,794 children formerly associated with armed groups; encourage the Government of Nigeria to continue to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive reintegration of all children released through family- and community-based reintegration programmes, as well as the provision of educational, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict, encouraging the Government of Nigeria

to focus on sustainable reintegration opportunities for children affected by armed conflict, in particular those who have been formerly associated with Boko Haram and the victims of abductions, forced marriage, and of sexual violence, including raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of these children and facilitate their return, while taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys;

- Welcoming the establishment of a human rights desk at the Nigerian army headquarters and in Borno state with dedicated child protection capacity to investigate violations and abuses against children in order to end impunity; stressing the importance of pursuing efforts towards accountability by investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for the six grave violations against children;
- Condemning in the strongest terms rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including sexual exploitation and abuse, by members of security forces and calling on the Government of Nigeria to ensure full accountability, as well as access to non-discriminatory and comprehensive specialized services, including psychosocial, health, legal and livelihood support and services, to survivors of sexual violence and take measures to prevent and end violations and abuses;
- Recalling the Government of Nigeria's endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration while expressing concern about the military use of schools by government forces in violation of its obligations under international law, stressing the importance of access to education and health care for children in Nigeria, and calling upon it to ensure that schools and related personnel are protected;

To Boko Haram factions

- Condemning in the strongest possible terms the continuing violations and abuses committed against children by Boko Haram, and strongly urging Boko Haram to immediately end all violations and abuses against children in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin and to immediately release without preconditions all children and end and prevent further recruitment and use of children, including re-recruitment of children who have formerly been released ;
- Expressing grave concern at the large numbers of children who have been recruited and used, including through cross-border recruitment, the use of children as human shields and the increasing use of girls as carriers of improvised explosive devices, and at the large numbers of children killed or maimed, including through attacks in Nigeria and neighboring countries, as well as the high number of incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and forced marriage perpetrated against children by Boko Haram;
- Strongly condemning the targeting of schools and increasing number of attacks on schools and threats of attacks on schools and their personnel by Boko Haram, included through the burning and total destruction of infrastructure, as well as physical attacks against education personnel that involved, inter alia, the killing and maiming of teachers and pupils, the abduction of children and the detonation of person-borne improvised explosive devices within school premises;
- Urging Boko Haram to cease the abduction of children, including cross-border abductions, including those specifically targeting girls, and all violations and abuses committed against abducted children, and to immediately release without preconditions all abducted children in their captivity;
- Recalling that the Security Council, by its resolution 2368 (2017), reaffirmed the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo affecting all individuals and entities, among whom Boko Haram, set out in paragraph 1 of resolution 2083 (2012);

- Expressing the readiness of the Working Group to communicate to the Security Council and 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 pertinent information with a view to assisting them in the imposition of the sanctions on perpetrators;

To the Civilian Joint Task Force

- Commending the CJTF for the constructive role it has played, in cooperation with the Government of Nigeria, in the adoption and implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by CJTF, including by facilitating the disengagement of 2,203 boys and girls; welcoming in that regard the importance of the conduct of joint verification missions of the CJTF, the Ministry of Justice of Borno State and the country task force to identify and separate associated children; encouraging the CJTF to fully implement its action plan and facilitate the separation of any remaining associated children; (SG report, para 69); noting that following the signing of the action plan in 2017, no new recruitment and use of children by CJTF was verified by the country task force ;
- Noting with appreciation that child protection units were established in CJTF sectors, including at the group's headquarters in Maiduguri;

To Community and religious leaders

- Emphasizing the important role of community and religious leaders in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict;
- Urging them to publicly condemn and continue to advocate ending and preventing violations and abuses against children, in particular those involving the recruitment and use of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abductions, attacks and threats of attacks against schools and hospitals; and to engage with the Government of Nigeria, 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.



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