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# Security Council

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## Children and armed conflict in Somalia

### 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 seventh report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia and covers the period from 1 October 2021 to 31 December 2024.

The report documents the impact of conflict on children in Somalia, highlighting trends and patterns with respect to the six grave violations against children, namely the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, 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,<sup>a</sup> the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access.<sup>b</sup> Where available, the report contains information on perpetrators. The report also outlines the progress made in addressing grave violations against children.

The report contains recommendations addressed to the parties to the conflict in Somalia aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening the protection of children.

<sup>a</sup> 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, other educational personnel, students, doctors and patients.

<sup>b</sup> Information related to the denial of humanitarian access to children is presented pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and follows guidelines of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. The information presented herein does not reflect the full humanitarian access situation in the country concerned.



## 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 October 2021 to 31 December 2024. It is the seventh report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia 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 Somalia and provides details of the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2022/397](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on children and armed conflict in Somalia ([S/AC.51/2024/2](#)). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the dialogue with parties to the conflict. Where possible, the parties to the conflict responsible for grave violations are identified. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/79/878-S/2025/247](#)), Al-Shabaab is listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, and attacks on schools and hospitals, under section B, non-State armed groups. Also under section B, Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a is listed for recruitment and use of children. Under section A, State actors, the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force are listed for killing and maiming and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

2. The information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Somalia, co-chaired by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), and subsequently the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) from 1 November 2024, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Insecurity and access challenges to some conflict-affected areas significantly hampered the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. Therefore, the information contained in the report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in Somalia during the reporting period and the actual number of 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, security and humanitarian developments

3. During the reporting period, the Federal Government of Somalia made progress in several key areas, including implementing the security transition and economic and financial reforms, reaching the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative completion point and acceding to the East African Community. In June 2024, Somalia was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 2025–2026 term.

4. The security situation in Somalia remained volatile. Al-Shabaab remained the main security threat and continued to perpetrate the majority of grave violations against children. Verified cases of abduction and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children by Al-Shabaab increased throughout the reporting period. Attacks by Da'esh and fighting between clan militias also continued. Those dynamics worsened an already dire humanitarian situation, increasing the vulnerabilities and protection needs of children.

5. Al-Shabaab continued to carry out high-impact, complex attacks against government officials, security forces and civilian targets in urban centres across the country. The most affected regions were Banaadir, Bay and Shabelle Hoose. For example, on 29 October 2022, two large vehicle-borne improvised explosive

devices were detonated at the Zoobe junction in the centre of Mogadishu, near the Ministry of Education, killing over 111 people, including five children, and injuring 318, including three children. On 4 January 2023, Al-Shabaab launched an attack on the Office of the District Commissioner and the local police station in Maxaas, Hiraan Region, killing 16 people, including five children, and injuring 30, including eight children. United Nations facilities in Mogadishu, Baidoa and Kismaayo also continued to be exposed to indirect fire attacks, resulting in casualties among United Nations personnel, as well as damage to facilities. Meanwhile, Da'esh continued its activities in Puntland, including attacks on government forces and civilian targets.

6. In June 2022, the Federal Government mobilized “community defence forces”, including regional, clan-based militias known as Ma’awisley, to support the Somali National Army in a military offensive against Al-Shabaab in central Somalia. In August 2022, the Federal Government announced its intention to degrade Al-Shabaab through financial, ideological and military means. The Somali security sector development plan of December 2023 reiterated the alliance between government forces and clan militias, but emphasized that the Somali National Army maintained command and control during joint operations with clan militias. The offensive to counter Al-Shabaab progressed in 2022 in the northern border areas of Hirshabelle and the central districts of Galmudug, with operational challenges, including logistics, force generation and intercommunity tensions, gradually increasing in 2023 and 2024. The impact of the conflict on the protection of children remained a concern, with continued high levels of incidents of recruitment and use of children as soldiers by parties to the conflict, including by the newly established “community defence forces”, verified during the reporting period.

7. In December 2022, protests erupted in Laascaanood, Sool Region, an area disputed between “Somaliland” and Puntland, following the killing of an opposition figure of the Somaliland National Party (Waddani) by unidentified perpetrators. In response, “Somaliland” deployed additional security forces, leading to at least 72 civilian casualties, including children, and reports of arbitrary detentions and excessive use of force. On 4 January 2023, the violence continued after the “Somaliland” security forces reportedly killed a man belonging to a local Dhulbahante clan militia, resulting in the withdrawal from the town of the “Somaliland” security forces the following day. Fighting over control of Laascaanood continued until February 2023, and at a lower intensity until May 2023, resulting in at least 476 civilian casualties, including children, and damage to civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. Sporadic violence persisted until September 2024.

8. By the end of 2024, in Galmudug State, there were reports of increasing inter- and intra-clan fighting over access to resources and land, with recurrent clan clashes in Gaalkacyo and south Mudug, leading to an increase in the recruitment and use of and killing and maiming of children.

9. A complex humanitarian situation persisted during the reporting period, exacerbated by climate shocks, with the worst drought in four decades between 2020 and 2023, which ended with heavier than usual seasonal rains causing widespread flooding, affecting over 468,000 people, from March to May 2023. Subsequent historic rains and flooding from October to December 2023 affected more than 2.5 million people and resulted in food insecurity and disease outbreaks, with a severe impact on children. By December 2024, because of conflict and insecurity, 6.9 million people needed humanitarian assistance, including 4.3 million children, and half a million people were internally displaced, over half of them children. In addition, owing to insecurity and displacement, an estimated 4.9 million children were out of school, increasing the risk of their recruitment and use as child soldiers and other grave violations.

10. In its resolution [2628 \(2022\)](#), the Security Council endorsed the decision of the African Union Peace and Security Council to reconfigure the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). Throughout the reporting period, security operations by government forces targeting Al-Shabaab continued, with the support of ATMIS.

### III. Grave violations against children

11. The country task force verified 8,493 grave violations against 6,801 children (5,142 boys, 1,659 girls). Compared with the previous reporting period, which covered 24 months, the average number of violations per month decreased from 335 to 217. Violations spiked in 2022 in the context of the military offensive against Al-Shabaab by government security forces and “community defence forces” in Galmudug and Hirshabelle States. A total of 1,481 children (1,294 boys, 187 girls) were victims of multiple violations, including: abduction for the purpose of recruitment (1,200); abduction and sexual violence (161); recruitment, killing and maiming (66); abduction, killing and maiming (36); abduction, recruitment, killing and maiming (9); rape and maiming (7); abduction, rape and maiming (1); and abduction, recruitment and sexual violence (1). During the reporting period, the country task force also verified the recruitment and use of six boys between January and September 2021 by clan militias (3), Al-Shabaab (1), Galmudug Police (1) and Puntland Police (1).

12. The violations were attributed to Al-Shabaab (5,587), representing 66 per cent of the total number of violations; followed by unidentified perpetrators (1,512); clan militias (471); government security forces (436) (Somali National Army (285), Somali Police Force (105), Somali security forces (23), National Intelligence and Security Agency (20), military police (2), joint Somali National Army and National Intelligence and Security Agency (1)); regional forces (291) (Puntland Police (98), Puntland Forces (74), Jubbaland Forces (31), Hirshabelle Police (18), “Somaliland” Forces (15), Galmudug Police (10), Jubbaland Police (9), South-West Forces (9), South-West Police (8), Galmudug Forces (7), Puntland Security Commando Forces (3), Puntland Maritime Police Force (4), joint “Somaliland” Security Forces and unidentified perpetrators (2), Jubbaland Intelligence (1), Puntland Intelligence Security Unit (1), Galmudug presidential guard (1)); “community defence forces” (87); Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama’a (33); Da’esh (23); clan militias in Sool (21); AMISOM (11); Ethiopian Liyu Police (11); ATMIS (7); Ethiopian National Defence Forces (2); and Westland militia (1). Violations were verified in Bay (1,281), Shabelle Hoose (1,168), Juba Dhexe (1,164), Hiraan (845), Shabelle Dhexe (817), Bakool (693), Gedo (614), Banaadir (544), Juba Hoose (448), Galguduud (385), Bari (199), Mudug (130), Sool (118), Nugal (60), Togdhere (11), near the Ethiopian border in Galguduud (9) and Sanaag (7).

13. Recruitment and use (2,821), abduction (2,556) and killing and maiming (2,143) of children were the three most verified violations, accounting for 89 per cent of the total. Attacks on schools and hospitals (145) were verified at higher levels compared with the previous reporting period (99), while incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children persisted at high levels (762).

14. Killing, maiming and sexual violence accounted for the majority of violations committed by unidentified perpetrators. This was largely due to the circumstances in which these violations occurred, for example, the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons during armed clashes, where the responsible party could not be identified, or incidents of crossfire, where attribution to a specific party was not possible. In cases of sexual violence, survivors often faced significant barriers to reporting and

identifying perpetrators due to protection concerns, fear of stigma or retaliation, and the intimate nature of the violation.

## **A. Recruitment and use**

15. The recruitment and use of 2,821 children (2,624 boys, 197 girls), as young as eight years old, was verified. Of these, 285 children were recruited and used during the fourth quarter of 2021, 1,094 children in 2022, 674 children in 2023 and 768 children in 2024. Al-Shabaab remained the main perpetrator, responsible for the recruitment and use of 2,317 children, representing 82 per cent of all cases. Other perpetrators included clan militias (166); regional forces (125) (Puntland Forces (44), Puntland Police (33), Jubbaland Forces (11), Galmudug Police (9), Somaliland Forces (8), Hirshabelle Police (6), Galmudug Forces (5), Jubbaland Police (4), Puntland Security Commando Forces (3), Jubbaland Intelligence (1), Puntland Intelligence Security Unit (1)); government security forces (101) (Somali National Army (61), Somali Police Force (32), National Intelligence and Security Agency (8)); “community defence forces” (62); Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama’a (29); clan militias in Sool (20); and unidentified perpetrators (1). Violations were verified in Shabelle Hoose (502), Juba Dhexe (489), Bay (351), Hiraan (266), Gedo (265), Bakool (236), Shabelle Dhexe (214), Galguduud (140), Juba Hoose (132), Mudug (56), Sool (51), Nugal (51), Banaadir (45), Bari (10), Togdhere (8) and Sanaag (5).

16. At least 333 children were used in combat roles and 228 children were used in support roles, including as bodyguards, cleaners and to operate checkpoints. Girls were predominantly used for domestic work, including as cooks or cleaners, as well as guards or messengers.

17. Methods of child recruitment included abduction from their homes or schools by armed groups (1,200), persuasion by local leaders, relatives or parents (563), coercion by armed groups (193), indoctrination (155) and financial incentives (28). Other factors leading to the recruitment and use of children were poverty or lack of livelihood opportunities (27), revenge (12) and unknown reasons (643). Mass abductions of children for the purpose of recruitment and use continued to be of serious concern.

18. In line with previously established patterns, Al-Shabaab increased its recruitment and use of children in response to the military offensives launched by the Somali National Army and “community defence forces” in 2022 in Galmudug and Hirshabelle States. Al-Shabaab continued to order communities to enrol children, predominantly boys, in religious studies at specific institutions either managed by the group or run by sympathizers. Children were often recruited from these religious studies institutions after undergoing indoctrination and military training. Furthermore, 20 per cent of all the children (563) were recruited by Al-Shabaab through peer-to-peer persuasion or dedicated recruiters. The group targeted children and young people through public gatherings and promised incentives to young recruits. For example, in October 2022, 12 boys aged between 14 and 17 were recruited by Al-Shabaab following a mobilization session organized by the group in two mosques in a village in Qoryooley district, Shabelle Hoose. The children were taken to one of Al-Shabaab’s main camps in the area.

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

19. A total of 797 children (778 boys, 19 girls), aged between 11 and 17, were detained by federal and regional government security forces for their alleged association with armed groups. Government security forces accounted for most of these detentions (722) (Somali Police Force (350), Somali National Army (182), National Intelligence

and Security Agency (106), joint National Intelligence and Security Agency and Somali Police Force (50), joint Somali Police Force and military police (13), joint National Intelligence and Security Agency and military police (10), joint National Intelligence and Security Agency, Somali Police Force and military police (7), military police (4)), followed by regional forces (73) (Hirshabelle Police (26), Jubbaland Forces (13), South-West Police (10), Galmudug Police (8), Jubbaland Police (6), Puntland Forces (6), Galmudug Forces (1), Puntland Police (1), Puntland Maritime Police Force (1) and South-West Darwish (1)), and the Ethiopian Liyu Police (2). Some 394 children (49 per cent) were later released, 1 child was killed in detention, while the remaining 402 children (51 per cent) remained in detention at the time of reporting. Children were detained for periods ranging from a couple of hours to several months.

## **B. Killing and maiming**

20. The killing (561) and maiming (1,582) of 2,143 children (1,576 boys, 567 girls), as young as infants, were verified. Of those, 188 child casualties occurred in the fourth quarter of 2021, 721 in 2022, 639 in 2023 and 595 in 2024. A significant number of child casualties (992) were attributed to unidentified perpetrators. Of those that could be attributed, the main perpetrators were Al-Shabaab (521), followed by government security forces (236) (Somali National Army (145), Somali Police Force (57), Somali security forces (23), National Intelligence and Security Agency (11)), clan militias (201) and regional forces (131) (Puntland Police (61), Puntland Forces (29), Jubbaland Forces (11), Hirshabelle Police (7), South-West Forces (7), South-West Police (5), Jubbaland Police (3), Puntland Maritime Police Force (4), Galmudug Forces (2), Galmudug Police (1), Galmudug presidential guard (1)). Other perpetrators included “community defence forces” (19), Da’esh (17), AMISOM-Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (11), ATMIS-Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (7), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama’a (4), Ethiopian Liyu Police (1), Westland militia (1), clan militias in Sool (1) and Ethiopian National Defence Forces (1). The violations were verified in Banaadir (445), Shabelle Hoose (406), Hiraan (216), Bari (171), Galguduud (164), Bay (156), Shabelle Dhexe (146), Juba Hoose (110), Bakool (86), Gedo (77), Juba Dhexe (74), Mudug (41), Sool (37), Nugal (8) and near the Ethiopian border in Galguduud (6).

21. The main causes of child casualties were mortar shelling and improvised explosive devices (674), small and light weapons (590), crossfire and stray bullets (479), unexploded ordnance and landmines (220), physical assault (107), unknown (46) and airstrikes (27). For example, on 9 June 2023, 27 children (20 boys, 7 girls) aged between 9 and 14 were killed and six others were injured when an unknown explosive device they were playing with exploded in Qoryooley district, Shabelle Hoose Region.

## **C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence**

22. The country task force verified rape and other forms of sexual violence against 762 children (4 boys, 758 girls), with 72 children affected in the fourth quarter of 2021, 221 children in 2022, 202 in 2023 and 267 in 2024. The majority of grave violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (423). The other cases were attributed to Al-Shabaab (189), government security forces (79) (Somali National Army (62), Somali Police Force (14), military police (2), joint Somali National Army and National Intelligence and Security Agency (1)), regional forces (17) (Jubbaland Forces (6), Hirshabelle Police (4), Puntland Police (4), Jubbaland Police (2), Puntland Forces (1)), clan militias (39), Ethiopian Liyu Police (9), “community defence forces” (4), Da’esh (1) and Ethiopian National Defence Forces (1). Violations were verified

in Juba Dhexe (144), Bay (138), Gedo (138), Hiraan (81), Bakool (69), Juba Hoose (57), Shabelle Dhexe (56), Banaadir (39), Galguduud (12), Mudug (11), Bari (11), Shabelle Hoose (5) and Nugal (1).

23. The incidents involved rape (380), forced marriage (158), sexual assault (94), gang rape (64), attempted rape (56), sexual harassment (8) and forced pregnancy (2). Of the children affected, 535 (3 boys, 532 girls) were provided with services ranging from psychosocial support to medical assistance, including HIV post-exposure prophylaxis kits, as well as transportation to medical facilities by the country task force. Rape and attempted rape often occurred within, or in the vicinity of, camps for internally displaced persons, when children were collecting firewood or water or while they were looking after animals. For instance, on 11 July 2024, nine girls aged between 14 and 17 were abducted for forced marriage by Al-Shabaab in Baidoa district, Bay Region. Prior to the abductions, the girls' fathers had been approached by members of the group expressing their intention to marry their daughters.

## **D. Attacks on school and hospitals**

24. The country task force verified 145 attacks on schools (117) and hospitals (28), including on protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals, attributed to Al-Shabaab (100); unidentified perpetrators (23); clan militias (13); regional forces (7) ("Somaliland" Forces (5), Hirshabelle Police (1) and South-West Forces (1)); and the Somali National Army (2). Violations were verified in Hiraan (28), Shabelle Dhexe (26), Bay (23), Sool (22), Juba Dhexe (12), Bakool (8), Gedo (7), Banaadir (7), Juba Hoose (4), Galguduud (4), Shabelle Hoose (2) and Mudug (2). Of these, 7 attacks (5 schools, 2 hospitals) occurred in the fourth quarter of 2021, 44 attacks (39 schools, 5 hospitals) in 2022, 55 attacks (37 schools, 18 hospitals) in 2023 and 39 attacks (36 schools, 3 hospitals) in 2024.

25. Attacks on schools and hospitals involved threats and abduction of teachers and students (68), physical damage to facilities (63) and other interference resulting in disruption of access to education and health activities (14). For instance, on 7 March 2023, mortar shells fired by "Somaliland" Forces during clashes with clan militias hit a mixed primary school in Laascaanood, destroying classrooms, the library and offices. On 25 February 2023, in Laascaanood, a male health worker was killed by a stray bullet during clashes between "Somaliland" forces and clan militias engaged in Sool Region while transporting injured civilians to Laascaanood hospital.

### **Military use of schools**

26. The country task force verified the military use of 15 schools by clan militias (8); Al-Shabaab (3); Somali National Army (2); National Intelligence and Security Agency (1); and Ethiopian National Defence Forces (1). The incidents occurred in Sool (7), Shabelle Dhexe (2), Gedo (2), Galgaduud (1), Hiraan (1), Bay (1), and Juba Hoose (1). A total of 12 of those schools were vacated, by clan militias (8), the Somali National Army (2), the National Intelligence and Security Agency (1) and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (1). By the end of the reporting period, three schools remained in use by Al-Shabaab.

## **E. Abduction**

27. The abduction of 2,556 children (2,232 boys, 324 girls), aged between 11 and 17, was verified, of which 226 violations occurred during the fourth quarter of 2021, 714 in 2022, 729 in 2023 and 887 in 2024. Al-Shabaab was responsible for 95 per cent of all abductions (2,440); followed by unidentified perpetrators (63); clan militias (35);

government security forces (9) (Somali National Army (7), Somali Police Force (2)); Da'esh (5); "community defence forces" (2); Ethiopian Liyu Police (1); and Jubbaland Forces (1). Violations were verified in Bay (599), Juba Dhexe (445), Shabelle Dhexe (371), Bakool (294), Shabelle Hoose (250), Hiraan (245), Juba Hoose (144), Gedo (113), Galguduud (61), Mudug (18), Bari (7), Banaadir (6) and near the Ethiopian border in Galguduud (3).

28. In almost half of the verified cases, abductions were conducted for the purpose of recruitment and use (1,200), followed by alleged spying for the Somali National Army (265), rape and other forms of sexual violence, including forced marriage (161), indoctrination (135), non-compliance with Al-Shabaab's code of conduct (120), extortion (118), intimidation and punishment (52), revenge (4), killing and maiming (3) and unknown reasons (498). Of the 2,556 children abducted, 497 children were released or managed to escape, while the status of 2,059 children was unknown at the time of reporting. For example, on 9 August 2022, 20 boys aged between 11 and 17 were abducted by Al-Shabaab in Garbaharey district, Gedo Region, and taken to Juba Hoose for the purpose of recruitment. Parents and community members could not engage with Al-Shabaab leaders to release the children due to fear of reprisals. In a similar incident, on 21 August 2022, Al-Shabaab abducted 60 boys in Dinsoor district, Bay Region, and forcibly enrolled them in an Al-Shabaab-run madrasa for indoctrination purposes.

## **F. Denial of humanitarian access**

29. The country task force verified 66 incidents of denial of humanitarian access. Of those, 5 incidents were verified during the fourth quarter of 2021, 23 in 2022, 26 in 2023 and 12 in 2024. Incidents were attributed to Al-Shabaab (20); clan militias (17); unidentified perpetrators (10); regional forces (10) (South-West Police (3), Jubbaland Forces (2), "Somaliland" Forces (2), joint "Somaliland" and unidentified perpetrators (2), South-West Forces (1)); and government security forces (9) (Somali National Army (8), National Intelligence and Security Agency (1)).

30. Incidents included threats and violence against humanitarian personnel (26), access restrictions for humanitarian organizations (10), interference and threats against beneficiaries (10), destruction of water facilities (9), disruption of distribution and looting of supplies (6), abduction of humanitarian personnel (2), destruction of property (1) and others (2). Denial of humanitarian access incidents were verified in Bay (14), Gedo (14), Hiraan (9), Sool (8), Shabelle Dhexe (4), Galguduud (4), Shabelle Hoose (3), Togdhere (3), Banaadir (2), Mudug (2), Sanaag (2) and Juba Hoose (1). For example, on 24 June 2023, members of Al-Shabaab abducted three humanitarian workers, including a driver, working for a local non-governmental organization providing humanitarian services in Burhakab district, Bay Region. At the time of writing, their whereabouts remained unknown. On 12 September 2023, two Somali National Army soldiers disrupted a beneficiary registration event being conducted by a local non-governmental organization in Gedo Region.

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

31. The Federal Government made significant efforts to end, prevent and respond to grave violations against children in close collaboration with the country task force, including on legislative frameworks to strengthen the protection of children, accountability efforts, and awareness-raising and training on the roles and

responsibilities of relevant stakeholders to protect and respond to the needs of children affected by armed conflict.

32. The Secretary-General, in his most recent report on children and armed conflict ([A/79/878-S/2025/247](#)), delisted the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force for the violation of recruitment and use of children. The Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force remain listed for other violations, as set out in annex I to that report. The country task force will continue to support the Federal Government in the implementation of the 2012 action plan to end the recruitment and use of children and the 2019 road map to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, and to monitor their implementation, in line with the conditions for delisting.

## **A. Action plans and dialogue with parties to the conflict**

33. The country task force continued to support the Federal Government in its commitment to advance the 2019 road map to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict and accelerate the implementation of the 2012 action plans on ending and preventing the killing and maiming and the recruitment and use of children. In 2022, to support the implementation of the action plans and road map, the Minister of Defence set up an Interministerial Committee on Children and Armed Conflict, with the participation of the Directors General of six line ministries, ensuring regular high-level engagement with the country task force. The Somali security forces continued to work closely with the country task force to conduct age-screening exercises and implement the 2014 standard operating procedures for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups to child protection actors. During the reporting period, with the support of the country task force, 8,582 Somali security forces (Somali National Army, Puntland Forces and South-West Police) were screened and six children were identified, separated and handed over to UNICEF for reintegration support. In 2022, UNICEF, UNSOM and Puntland's Ministry of Women, Development and Family Affairs jointly screened and separated 56 boys associated with clan militias and regional forces in Puntland. Separately, in 2023, 390 members of "community defence forces" fighting alongside the Somali National Army were screened in Galmudug, during which five children were identified, separated and handed over to UNICEF for reintegration purposes.

34. The country task force continued to engage at the technical level with national authorities through the national and state-level working groups on children and armed conflict to share trends of grave violations and ensure effective implementation of the 2019 road map, focusing on enhancing coordination between key line ministries, state security forces, civil society organizations and community leaders to strengthen the protection of children.

## **B. Legislative reform and policy measures**

35. Important progress was made to strengthen the legislative framework and policies to protect children in Somalia. On 2 December 2024, the Disability Rights Protection Law was signed, prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities, including children, in all areas of public and private life, and addressing barriers to the full enjoyment of their rights and inclusion in society. As at the end of the reporting period, the constitutional review process was ongoing, with the first four amended chapters to the Provisional Constitution of 2012 signed into law on 31 March 2024, maintaining the definition of a child as a person below 18 years of age.

36. Other processes to strengthen the legal framework for the protection of children continued, including the child rights bill, which remains under review at the ministerial level, and the juvenile justice bill, which continues to be under review in Parliament. On 25 November 2024, the Cabinet endorsed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which was pending approval by Parliament at the time of reporting. The Federal Government continued to work on the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

37. In November 2022, “Somaliland” enacted the Child Rights Act, which defines a child as a person below 15 years of age. The country task force continued its advocacy for the Act to be amended to define a child as a person below 18 years of age. In a positive development, in Galmudug State, on 21 March 2024, an act prohibiting female genital mutilation was signed by the Galmudug State President, the first time that a state president has implemented such a prohibition in Somalia. On 24 June 2024, the “Somaliland” President issued a decree stating that rape cases must be prosecuted exclusively through the formal court system, as opposed to the informal justice system, and instructing the Police Commissioner and the Attorney General to ensure that the accused were brought before formal courts. On 31 December 2024, the South-West State Assembly approved the Disability Rights Act, requiring the South-West State government to protect the rights of children with disabilities and respond to their specific needs.

38. The review process of the South-West State and Jubbaland child rights bills continued through the end of the reporting period.

39. In August 2022, the Cabinet endorsed a national policy to implement the Safe Schools Declaration, developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education. In July 2023, the Federal Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs validated the age verification guidelines and standardized checklist, aimed at creating a formal, child-friendly procedure for age assessment in the absence of a comprehensive national birth registration system, with a view to reducing the number of cases of children associated with Al-Shabaab being sentenced to lengthy prison terms or death. The Federal Government has operationalized the guidelines by providing age verification training to key national authorities and Somali security forces in Mogadishu in December 2023 and in Jubbaland in November 2024.

### **C. Accountability for perpetrators of grave violations**

40. Challenges to the rule of law and impunity persisted during the reporting period, with limited information available to the United Nations on actions taken by justice authorities to follow up on incidents. Reports were also received that communities opted for traditional justice mechanisms over the formal justice system, because of lack of trust and concerns about the effectiveness of the system.

41. Nevertheless, some progress was made with respect to accountability for grave violations against children by Somali security forces, through strong engagement between the country task force and the Federal Government. In March 2024, the country task force co-chairs met with senior security officials to discuss verified violations from 2023 attributed to Somali security forces. Following this, a letter summarizing the incidents was sent by the co-chairs to the Minister of Defence, who established an 11-member investigative committee. In November 2024, preliminary findings and actions taken were presented at a meeting of the Interministerial Committee. The final report was pending as at 31 December 2024.

42. In Puntland, children continued to be detained for alleged association with Al-Shabaab and faced military prosecution. On 17 August 2024, four young adults were executed in Galkayo, Puntland, following their convictions and death sentences for crimes they had committed when they were associated with Al-Shabaab while under the age of 18. Prior to their execution, the Puntland age verification committee, which included representatives from the Puntland authorities, concluded that they had been minors at the time the crimes had been committed and recommended not to impose the death penalty. The United Nations had advocated with the President of Puntland for the young adults to be pardoned, but with no success.

43. The AMISOM/ATMIS amends advisory committee had approved ex gratia payments in cases involving 18 children killed and maimed by AMISOM and ATMIS in 2022 and 2023, although those payments had not been disbursed due to lack of funding. In addition, AMISOM/ATMIS continued to implement the Force Commander's directive on the protection of children during military operations.

#### **D. Advocacy and mainstreaming**

44. The country task force conducted and supported training sessions, including training of trainers, on child protection and on the children and armed conflict mandate for 3,031 Somali security forces (2,878 men, 153 women).

45. In 2024, the country task force worked closely with the Civil-Military Coordination Department of the Somali National Army, which has been leading the development of a basic training curriculum on international human rights and international humanitarian law, including on grave violations against children and conflict-related sexual violence. It also raised awareness of the joint responsibilities of the Government and the United Nations in the context of the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces, the 2012 action plans on ending the killing and maiming and recruitment and use of children, the 2019 road map to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, and the joint communiqué on ending conflict-related sexual violence. The Civil-Military Coordination Department provided the training during five separate training events for a total of 125 soldiers (105 men, 20 women) in Mogadishu (Banaadir), Kismaayo (Jubbaland State), Beledweyne (Hirshabelle State) and Dhuusamarreeb (Galmudug State).

46. Together with the relevant ministries of Jubbaland, Hirshabelle, South-West and Galmudug States, the country task force conducted capacity-building and outreach activities with media, civil society organizations, community leaders and internally displaced communities. Child protection community-based networks composed of community leaders and civil society organizations continued to function in South-West State and Jubbaland, while new ones were set up in Galmudug and Hirshabelle States. For example, in 2024, 12 activities were implemented with civil society, reaching 392 participants (274 men, 118 women), to raise awareness about conflict-related impacts on children and the roles and responsibilities of communities in addressing those impacts. Separately, the four community-based monitoring networks in Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubbaland and South-West States were provided with mentoring by the country task force to strengthen their capacity to monitor and report grave violations against children and carry out advocacy with local authorities on response measures.

47. In coordination with the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Defence, the country task force conducted awareness-raising activities on child recruitment. From 12 to 23 March 2023, a radio campaign featuring messages from the Deputy Chief of the Defence Forces aired in Galmudug and Hirshabelle. The Ministry also held

sessions with community leaders and clan elders on ending child recruitment by clan militias. On 20 November 2024, to mark the Universal Children's Day, 42 Somali National Army troops (39 men, 3 women) received awareness-raising training on the 2014 standard operating procedures for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups and on the Somali National Army code of conduct.

## **E. Release of children**

48. Somali authorities and security forces continued to implement the 2014 standard operating procedures for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups. At the Government's request, in 2022 and 2023, UNSOM airlifted 23 children separated from armed groups from Baidoa and Adan Yabaal Regions to Mogadishu for them to benefit from UNICEF-supported reintegration and family reunification. Overall, since October 2021, 3,665 children (3,159 boys, 506 girls) formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups and vulnerable children at risk of recruitment were enrolled in UNICEF-supported reintegration programmes. In 2022, with support from UNICEF, the Federal Ministry of Internal Security established the Child Protection Unit to support and enhance the handover of children. The Child Protection Unit identified and transferred to UNICEF a total of 1,211 children (232 girls, 979 boys) associated with armed forces and armed groups between 2022 and 2024.

## **F. Programmatic response**

49. The Mine Action Service provided explosive ordnance risk education training in Banaadir, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubbaland, South-West, Puntland and "Somaliland", reaching 119,750 beneficiaries, including 49,054 boys and 36,477 girls.

50. Some 1,830 child survivors of abduction, maiming and sexual violence (921 boys, 909 girls) received support, including medical, psychosocial and transportation support, of whom 535 victims of sexual violence (3 boys, 532 girls) were referred to support services and received relevant assistance.

51. In 2023, under the Women, Peace and Protection Joint Programme, UNSOM, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) supported the Federal Government to establish three one-stop centres in Baidoa, South-West State, Dhuusamarreeb, Galmudug State, and Kismaayo, Jubbaland State, to provide survivors of sexual violence, including children, with emergency medical and psychosocial support and temporary shelter.

## **V. Observations and recommendations**

52. I am appalled by and strongly condemn the devastatingly high number of grave violations against children that persists in Somalia, particularly the staggering numbers attributed to Al-Shabaab. These are caused by the level of insecurity linked to Al-Shabaab's activities, which have catastrophic effects on children. I am deeply concerned about the shocking and continued mass abductions of children, including from families coerced into handing over their children, for the purpose of recruitment and use and sexual violence. I also remain concerned about the high number of violations attributed to clan militias and about the harmful impact of mines and explosive devices on children. I reiterate my call upon all parties to the conflict to

end, prevent and respond to grave violations against children and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. I reiterate the need for the parties to separate children from their ranks in a timely manner and allow for their social and economic reintegration.

53. I remain concerned about the prevalent impunity for grave violations against children. I call upon the Federal Government to hold perpetrators accountable in line with international human rights law and standards and ensure remedy for survivors.

54. I welcome the consistent engagement of the Federal Government with the United Nations and the steps taken to advance the 2012 action plans and the 2019 road map to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. The establishment of the Interministerial Committee on Children and Armed Conflict is a positive development in promoting comprehensive engagement by the line ministries in addressing the impact of conflict on children.

55. It is imperative that the commitments made in the 2012 action plans, the 2019 road map and the 2013 joint communiqué on ending sexual violence in conflict are meaningfully implemented. I remain concerned about the limited progress made to end and prevent sexual violence in conflict against children, and urge the Federal Government to pass laws in line with the country's international human rights obligations. I also encourage the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force to continue their efforts to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

56. I welcome the collaboration between the Federal Government and the United Nations to screen security forces. I urge the Federal Government to swiftly release and hand over any associated children to civilian child protection actors for reintegration.

57. I commend the Federal Government for the endorsement of the age verification guidelines and the standardized checklist and their roll-out at the state level, and call upon all parties to continue to apply the standard operating procedures for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups, adopted in 2014. I reiterate my call to allow child protection actors access to children at every stage of the release and reintegration process.

58. I call upon the Federal Government and federal member states to treat children primarily as victims, in line with the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which were endorsed by Somalia, and welcome the collaboration between the United Nations and the military courts to identify and hand over children. I note with concern that a high number of children continue to be detained for their alleged association with armed groups. I am distressed that the death penalty has been imposed on children and young people arrested as children.

59. I welcome the progress made by the Federal Government in strengthening the legal framework for the protection of children and urge it to finalize ongoing legislative processes, including the juvenile justice bill and the child rights bill, regarding the age of majority. I welcome the endorsement of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child by the Cabinet and reiterate my call for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

60. I welcome the efforts made by the federal member states to strengthen child protection laws and policies, including the promulgation of an act prohibiting female genital mutilation in Galmudug. I also welcome the progress made in the development of a bill on child rights and an act on disability rights in South-West State, and a bill prohibiting female genital mutilation, a bill on child rights and a child protection

policy in Jubbaland, and encourage other federal member states to make similar efforts. I reiterate my call for the application of the Juvenile Act in Puntland.

61. I pay tribute to AMISOM/ATMIS personnel for their sacrifices and welcome the continued cooperation between the United Nations and AMISOM/ATMIS on the protection of children. I encourage the consistent implementation of the Force Commander's directive on the protection of children during military operations. I welcome the approval by the AMISOM/ATMIS amends advisory committee of ex gratia payments for cases affecting children. I encourage resources to be made available to enable the disbursement of the payments.

62. I urge donors, including those within the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, to reinforce and sustain their financial and technical investments in child protection in Somalia. This includes prioritizing funding for the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, comprehensive reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, and survivor-centred, age-appropriate and gender-sensitive support services to ensure the long-term protection and recovery of conflict-affected children.

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