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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 Nigeria, 2023

The information provided has been gathered by the UN Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), co-chaired by the United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNICEF. 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 UPR45 on Nigeria

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

12 July 2023

Background

Between January 2019 and December 2022, the number of grave violations against children verified by the United Nations through the Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in north-east Nigeria remained worryingly high. The majority of violations was attributed to armed groups, notably Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The monitoring and reporting mechanism is implemented in the three conflict-affected States in north-east Nigeria, namely, Adamawa, Borno and Yobe.

During the period under review, the number of grave violations against children reached its peak in 2022, when 524 grave violations were verified. The killing and maiming and abduction of children were the most prominent grave violations verified. The abduction of children increased exponentially, from 44 cases in 2019, to 76 in 2020, 211 in 2021 and 246 in 2022. Most children were abducted by JAS, followed by ISWAP. The killing and maiming of children decreased throughout the period from 120 child casualties verified in 2019 to 53 in 2022. Child casualties resulted mainly from gunshots, shelling and improvised explosive devices. For example, in 2019, 41 out of the total child casualties were due to explosions of improvised explosive devices borne by civilians, including 9 children who were used as carriers. The recruitment and use of children increased throughout the reporting period, with 46 cases verified in 2019, 7 in 2020, 63 in 2021 and 136 in 2022. Verified instances of rape and other forms of sexual violence notably against girls also continued to increase, with 30 violations verified in 2019, 10 in 2020, 54 in 2021 and 73 in 2022. Most girls were raped and forcibly married to JAS and ISWAP elements following their abduction and during their association with armed groups. The safe access of humanitarian actors to conflict-affected populations, including children, as well as the detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups, were also issues of great concern for the protection of children.

The documentation and verification of information pertaining to grave violations continued to be a challenge, owing to insecurity and lack of access to some areas under the control or influence of armed groups in north-east Nigeria. Therefore, the actual figures of grave violations against children are believed to be higher.

Following the signing of an action plan with the United Nations in September 2017 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) implemented concrete measures to end this violation and to facilitate the release of children. The CJTF was delisted from the annexes of the 2021 Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict following a significant decrease in the recruitment and use of children through the continued implementation of its action plan. Through the years the government of Borno State continued to provide support to the CJTF to sustain its efforts to implement the action plan.

During the reporting period, the Government of Nigeria, with United Nations support, facilitated the reintegration of thousands of children formerly associated with armed groups. Children were provided with reintegration support including for the development of microenterprise and business start-up skills, in order to assist with the start of livelihood activities. Younger children were enrolled in school.

Child Rights Bills were signed into law in Borno State in January 2022, in Yobe State in June 2022 and Adamawa State in July 2022. The new laws provide a legal framework for the protection of conflict-affected children and represent substantive advancement of children's rights in Nigeria.

On 30 September 2022, the "Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, United Nations Systems in Nigeria and the UNICEF Country Office in Nigeria on the Handover Protocol for Children encountered in the course of armed conflict in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin Region" was signed. The Handover Protocol provides an opportunity to prevent or reduce the detention of children encountered by armed and security forces, by identifying and transferring children allegedly associated with armed groups within a period of seven days to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development.

Recommendations to the Government of Nigeria

- **Continue** to implement the "Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, United Nations Systems in Nigeria and the UNICEF Country Office in Nigeria on the Handover Protocol for Children encountered in the course of armed conflict in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin Region" signed in September 2022.
- **Release** children detained for their actual or alleged association with armed groups. **Treat** children associated with armed groups primarily as victims and use detention as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, with the best interests of the child and international standards for juvenile justice as guiding principles. **Continue** to coordinate with relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations, before the release of

detained children, to allow adequate time for the preparation of the programmatic response. **Provide** unhindered access to child protection actors to detention facilities.

- **Set up** a formal, comprehensive and integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for children released from armed groups into their communities, especially in Borno State.
- **Continue** to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive reintegration of all children released, as well as the provision of educational, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict. **Pay** particular **attention** to the risks of the re-recruitment of children, in particular in the light of the large number of individuals, including children, escaping from JAS.
- **Endorse** the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.
- **Pursue** efforts to promote accountability by investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for grave violations against children. Ensure that all victims have access to justice and are provided with comprehensive, age-appropriate and gender-sensitive protection services.