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Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, which covers the period from January to December 2018, is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2427 (2018). The preparation of the report involved broad consultations within the United Nations, in the field and at Headquarters, and with relevant Member States. It highlights global trends regarding the impact of armed conflict on children and provides information on violations committed from January to December 2018, as well as related protection concerns. Where possible, violations are attributed to parties to conflict and, pursuant to resolutions of the Council, the annexes to the present report include a list of parties that, in violation of international law, engage in the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and/or hospitals and attacks or threats of attacks against protected personnel,[1] and the abduction of children.

2. All the information contained in the report has been vetted for accuracy by the United Nations. In situations where the ability to verify information was hampered by factors such as insecurity or access restrictions, it is qualified as such. In this regard, the information contained in the report is only indicative and does not represent the full scale of violations committed in 2018. In addition, some incidents, in particular instances of the recruitment and use of children, abduction and sexual violence committed against children, were verified in 2018 but may have commenced earlier.

3. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and in identifying situations that fall within the scope of the mandate, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has adopted a pragmatic approach aimed at ensuring broad and effective protection for children. Reference to a situation is not a legal

[1] Under the terms of Security Council resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), protected persons are considered to be teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.

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determination and reference to a non-State actor does not affect its legal status. Accordingly, the present report documents situations in which apparent violations of international norms and standards for the protection of children affected by conflict are considered to be of such gravity as to warrant international concern. In characterizing the facts described below as grave violations, it is the aim of my Special Representative to bring these situations to the attention of Governments, which bear the primary responsibility of providing effective protection and relief to all affected children, and to encourage Governments to take remedial measures.

4. Where significant progress was achieved and measures taken by listed parties positively affected the protection of children or where ongoing conduct gave rise to concern, this is highlighted in the country-specific sections. On the basis of the approach of enhanced engagement with Member States to prevent violations against children, the annexes distinguish between listed parties that have put in place measures aimed at improving the protection of children during the reporting period and parties that have not.

II. Addressing the impact of armed conflict on children

A. Overview of the situation of children and armed conflict

5. Continued fighting between parties to conflict, new conflict dynamics and operational tactics, combined with widespread disregard for international law, had a devastating effect on children in 2018. More than 24,000 grave violations[2] against children were verified by the United Nations in 20 country situations. While the number of violations attributed to non-State actors remained steady, there was an alarming increase in the number of violations attributed to State actors and to international forces compared with 2017 (see A/72/865-S/2018/465).

6. Verified cases of the killing and maiming of children reached record levels globally since the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). In Afghanistan, the number of child casualties remained the highest such number in the present report (3,062) and children accounted for 28 per cent of all civilian casualties. In the Syrian Arab Republic, air strikes, barrel bombs and cluster munitions resulted in 1,854 child casualties, and in Yemen, 1,689 children bore the brunt of ground fighting and other offensives.

7. Some 13,600 children benefited from release and reintegration worldwide. However, children continued to be forced to take an active part in hostilities, including to carry out suicide bombings against civilians. Others were used in support roles, for example as sexual slaves or as human shields. Somalia remained the country with the highest number of cases of the recruitment and use of children (2,300) followed by Nigeria (1,947).

8. Attacks on schools and hospitals had a devastating effect on access to education and to health services for thousands of children, with a total of 1,023 verified attacks. In the Syrian Arab Republic, 2018 witnessed the highest numbers of attacks on schools and medical facilities (225) recorded since the beginning of the conflict. In Afghanistan, schools and hospitals (254) were increasingly targeted. Increased numbers of attacks were also verified in the Central African Republic, Colombia, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen.

[2] The use of the term “grave violations” or “violations” refer to each individual child affected by recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence and abductions, while the number of incidents is used for attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access.

9. In 2018, 933 cases of sexual violence against children were verified. The highest verified figures for violations relating to sexual violence continue to be documented in Somalia (331) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (277). Cases of violations relating to sexual violence remained significantly underreported, in particular when perpetrated against boys, owing to stigma, the lack of services and concerns for the protection of victims (for more information, see the annual report on conflict-related sexual violence, S/2019/280). Impunity for sexual violence against girls and boys by parties to conflict remained endemic.

10. Some 2,493 children were abducted in 2018. The highest numbers were verified in Somalia (1,609), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (367) and Nigeria (180). Increased numbers of abductions were verified in South Sudan (109), the Syrian Arab Republic (69), the Central African Republic (62), the Sudan (22) and the Philippines (13). Children were abducted from homes, schools and public spaces by parties to conflict, often as a precursor to other grave violations, notably recruitment and use, and sexual abuse, including sexual slavery, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and the Syrian Arab Republic.

11. In times of armed conflict, throughout the world, millions of people, children foremost among them, have inadequate access to or have been denied assistance that is essential for their survival and well-being. In 2018, only 795 incidents of denial of humanitarian access could be verified, compared with 1,213 in 2017. The decrease could be explained by restricted access to information, rather than an improvement of the situation. The shrinking of humanitarian space translated into widespread insecurity, severe and persistent constraints on humanitarian access, threats and the perpetration of violence against humanitarian personnel and civilian infrastructure, thereby preventing child protection actors and humanitarian actors from gaining access to information.

B. Challenges in ensuring a child-rights based response

12. Consent of the child is not a valid defence for the crime of recruiting and using children in war. Children actually or allegedly associated with armed forces and armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, must be treated primarily as victims. These groups have abducted, recruited and used children nationally or transnationally. The children affected have been exposed to the highest degrees of violence and exploitation, leaving a severe impact on their physical and mental well-being.

13. Thousands of children actually or allegedly associated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and affiliated groups, as well as children born of sexual violence, were deprived of their liberty, with limited or no parental care, access to food, medical and psychosocial support, and no access to legal or consular services. In December 2018, 1,248 children of 46 nationalities from areas formerly controlled by ISIL, mainly under the age of 5, were deprived of their liberty in internally displaced persons' sites in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. In Iraq, 902 children remained in detention on national security-related charges, including for their association or alleged association with ISIL. Similarly, 418 children were deprived of liberty in Nigeria for their or their parents' alleged association with Boko Haram and 375 children were detained in Somalia for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab. The deprivation of liberty of children for their actual or alleged association with groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period of time.

14. The best interests of the child must be given primary consideration in all actions affecting their lives, with no exception. All children below the age of 18 have specific

rights to protection and should be treated first and foremost as victims. Member States must take responsibility for their nationals, including the children of their nationals who are deprived of their liberty in Iraq and in the Syrian Arab Republic for their alleged or actual association with these groups. The reintegration of all children affected by armed conflict must be prioritized through a comprehensive, coordinated and child rights-based approach so as to prevent recurring cycles of violence and to build sustainable peace for all children.

C. The way forward: prevention and reintegration

15. The prevention of violence against children in armed conflict is a crucial element in building and sustaining peace, as well as in ensuring that children and youth realize their rights and tap into their potential as agents of change, as identified in "Youth 2030 – The United Nations Strategy on Youth". The development of national, subregional or regional prevention plans covering all violations, as called for in Security Council resolution 2427 (2018), would both sustain the gains made through action plans, beyond the duration of those plans, and systematize preventive measures across regions. My Special Representative launched a process of proactive engagement with national, subregional and regional actors in order to develop prevention initiatives to prevent violations against children affected by armed conflict, in support of my vision on prevention, the Sustainable Development Goals and the sustaining peace resolutions, Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262.

16. Member States have a central role in providing long-term and sustainable reintegration programmes, including providing predictable funding for such programmes. Such support is crucial for ensuring the well-being of children and sustaining peace and security. Reintegration programmes must include mental health and psychosocial support, education and vocational training, as well as community-based interventions and access to a civil registry and to justice, taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys, including children with disabilities, so as to enable all children affected by armed conflict to return to their communities and regain their childhood. The role of Member States is now supported by the creation of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, which was established and is co-led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and aims to further explore and address existing gaps and needs for the reintegration of all children affected by conflict.

III. Information on violations committed against children during armed conflict and progress made by parties on dialogue, action plans and other measures to halt and prevent violations against children

A. Situations on the agenda of the Security Council

Afghanistan

17. Children continued to bear the brunt of the conflict, accounting for 28 per cent of all civilian casualties, with 3,062 verified cases of children who were killed and maimed in 2018, with the number of children killed (927) being the highest number ever recorded in Afghanistan. In addition, in response to the 2018 parliamentary elections, armed groups attacked election sites, more than half of which were based

in schools. Also of concern was the Taliban's use of indirect fire systems such as mortars, grenades and rockets in and from civilian-populated areas on election days, which had indiscriminate effects and contributed to child casualties.

Grave violations

18. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 45 boys and 1 girl, with some of the children recruited as young as 8, who were used for combat, at checkpoints, to plant improvised explosive devices, to carry out suicide attacks or other violations, or for sexual exploitation. At least 22 boys were killed during their association. Of those violations, 67 per cent of the instances of recruitment and use were attributed to armed groups (31), including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (17 boys in one incident), Taliban (11), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) (2) and an unidentified armed group (1). On 14 March, in Dehe Bala District, Nangarhar Province, ISIL-KP used two boys to publicly execute three men accused of being associated with the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The 15 remaining children were recruited and used by Afghan local police (6), Afghan National Police (1) and pro-government militias (8).

19. As at December 2018, the Government reported that 205 boys were detained in juvenile rehabilitation centres on national security-related charges.

20. The United Nations verified 3,062 child casualties (927 killed, 2,135 maimed), including 831 girls. The leading causes were ground engagements (276 killed, 916 maimed) and non-suicide improvised explosive devices (129 killed, 388 maimed), followed by aerial operations (236 killed, 256 maimed), which represented an increase compared with 2017.

21. Armed groups were responsible for 44 per cent of child casualties (1,343), including the Taliban (997), ISIL-KP (217), unidentified armed groups (114), self-proclaimed ISIL-KP (7) and jointly to different armed groups (8). The United Nations attributed 34 per cent of child casualties (1,051) to government and pro-government forces, including the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (629) – mainly the Afghan National Army (467) – international forces[3] (286), pro-government militias (56), joint operations of government and pro-government forces (58) and undetermined government and pro-government forces (22). Another 15 per cent of the child casualties were jointly attributed to government and pro-government forces and armed groups. Some 6 per cent of the casualties could not be attributed to a specific party to the conflict and 1 per cent was caused by cross-border shelling.

22. The United Nations verified four cases of sexual violence, affecting two boys and two girls, perpetrated by the Afghan National Police (3) and the Afghan local police (1). The two boys were used as *bacha bazi*.

23. A total of 192 attacks against schools and protected personnel were verified. Of those attacks, 92 per cent were attributed to armed groups, mainly the Taliban (123) and ISIL-KP (42). Attacks were also attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (6), pro-government militias (3), international forces (1), and jointly to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and armed groups (3). During the parliamentary elections held in October, more than half of the voter registration and polling sites were located in schools, which were targeted in 92 election-related attacks mostly attributed to the Taliban (85). An additional cause for concern is the emerging trend of attacks and threats by armed groups against education facilities, perpetrated in particular by ISIL-KP, which led to widespread school closures and

[3] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is part of the international forces and leads the Resolute Support Mission, a non-combat operation with the mandate to train, advise and assist Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and institutions.

many casualties. ISIL-KP expressly declared its intention to target schools, specifically girls' schools.

24. A total of 62 attacks on hospitals and protected personnel were verified, 74 per cent of which were attributed to armed groups, including the Taliban (30), ISIL-KP (11), self-proclaimed ISIL-KP (3) and unidentified armed groups (2). The remaining attacks were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (5), international forces (4), pro-government militias (2) and 1 to an undetermined pro-government force. Four attacks were jointly attributed to different parties.

25. The United Nations verified the military use of five schools by the Afghan National Army (4) and ISIL-KP (1) and of two medical facilities by the ANDSF (1) and by both the Taliban and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (1).

26. Similar to the numbers reported in 2017, the abduction of 42 boys and 1 girl was verified, mostly by armed groups: the Taliban (36), ISIL-KP (3), self-proclaimed ISIL-KP, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and Hizb-i Islami (1 each). The abduction and sexual exploitation of one girl by an Afghan local police commander was verified.

27. The United Nations verified 44 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, mainly attributed to armed groups: the Taliban (27), ISIL-KP (10) and self-proclaimed ISIL-KP (2). The 5 remaining incidents were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (3) and pro-government militias (2). Of particular concern is the fact that these groups have also hindered demining activities and vaccination campaigns, especially vaccination against polio, reportedly preventing 840,000 children from receiving immunizations. In addition, the number of instances of violence against humanitarian personnel remained high, with 28 aid workers killed, 53 injured and 88 abducted during the reporting period.

Developments and concerns

28. I note the significant reduction in the recruitment and use of children by the Afghan Security Forces and commend the measures taken by the Government to better protect children affected by armed conflict, including through the child protection units in the Afghan National Police recruitment centres, which now cover all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, and the entry into force of the revised Penal Code, which explicitly criminalizes the recruitment and use of children, including *bacha bazi* and falsification of *tazkeras* (identity documents). I call for the full application of the revised Code. Notwithstanding those developments, the use of children, including *bacha bazi*, remains an issue of concern. I urge the Government to address remaining gaps, specifically the lack of screening mechanisms within the Afghan local police and the use of children at police checkpoints, and to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of grave violations against children.

29. I call on the Government to release children allegedly or currently associated with parties to conflict from detention facilities in accordance with the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), which were endorsed by Afghanistan in 2017. In addition, children detained on national-security related charges need to be transferred to juvenile rehabilitation centres and have access to all services, in line with international juvenile justice standards.

30. I remain extremely concerned about the continuous high numbers of children killed and maimed by all parties, notably the record high number of children killed in 2018. I note the decrease of child casualties attributed to the Afghan security forces, and the measures taken by the Government to mitigate child casualties. I commend the ongoing implementation of the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation, adopted in October 2017, as well as the entry into force of 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), in February 2018, and the revision of the aerial targeting protocols, and encourage the Government to continue the inclusion of legal advisers in targeting processes. I strongly encourage the Government to include aspects relating to ending and preventing killing and maiming in the existing action plan. I am also alarmed by the increase in the number of children killed and maimed by international forces, especially in aerial operations. I welcome the precautionary measures to mitigate civilian and child casualties in military operations, including the designation by the United States of America Department of Defense of a senior civilian responsible for coordinating compliance with policies relating to non-combatant casualties in United States military operations. I also note the role of the Senior Child Protection Adviser of the Resolute Support Mission in protecting children in armed conflict. I request my Special Representative to engage proactively and follow up on the implementation of all measures taken by the Government and international forces to mitigate child casualties. I strongly urge the Government and international forces to immediately take additional extraordinary measures to protect children during military operations, including during aerial operations, and to continue to abide by their obligations under international law. I reiterate my call on armed groups to immediately cease the killing and maiming of children.

31. I am concerned about the continued recruitment and use of children by armed groups, including for combat roles, as well as about attacks that affect access to education and health, including during elections, demining activities and vaccination campaigns, and demand that concerned parties, notably the Taliban and ISIL-KP, put an immediate halt to such actions. I strongly encourage the Government to prioritize the protection of schools and hospitals during elections. I urge listed parties to conflict to engage with the United Nations so as to elaborate action plans.

Central African Republic

32. Violence between armed and criminal groups for the control of strategic sites and economic resources, and intercommunal tensions, including between Muslim and Christian communities, remained the primary source of insecurity and threats against civilians. Serious incidents, mostly related to transhumance and access to mining sites, occurred at the end 2018 in Ouaka, Haut-Mbomou and Ouham Prefectures. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic facilitated local peace processes, involving armed groups and community leaders, in order to reduce violence and increase humanitarian space. The peace process culminated in the signing on 6 February 2019 of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic between the Government and 14 armed groups.

Grave violations

33. A total of 75 children (14 girls, 61 boys), some as young as 6, were recruited and used by anti-balaka (34); former Séléka factions (27), including Mouvement national pour la libération de la Centrafrique (MNLC) (14), Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) (10), Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique (RPRC) (2) and Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) (1); Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (10); PK5 groups (3); and Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3R) (1). Children were used as combatants, informants, porters, cooks, servants and for sexual purposes.

34. One girl and seven boys were detained by the national authorities for association with anti-balaka (six); FPRC and Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) (one

each). All were released except for the boy associated with UPC, whose case is still pending before the court.

35. A total of 114 children (38 girls, 76 boys) were verified as having been killed (71) and maimed (43), a slight increase compared with 2017. The victims, some as young as four months, were affected as a result of shootings (92), the use of machetes (12), arson (8) and stabbing (2), during attacks on their communities. The majority of child casualties were attributed to former Séléka factions (63), followed by anti-balaka (20) and PK5 groups (9). Ouaka and Nana-Grébizi were the most affected prefectures. In October, anti-balaka elements killed 12 children by machete outside Zemio, Haut-Mbomou Prefecture, in an indiscriminate attack against two Fulani families.

36. The United Nations verified incidents of sexual violence affecting 58 girls and 1 boy, some as young as 8. A total of 18 girls were gang-raped, and 14 girls were victims of sexual violence during their association with armed groups. The main perpetrators were anti-balaka and former Séléka factions (18 each). One anti-balaka element, a member of FPRC and a police auxiliary were arrested and detained for the rape of children. The anti-balaka member was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment.

37. A total of 34 attacks against schools and 22 attacks against hospitals were verified, a 21 per cent increase as relates to schools and 16 per cent increase as relates to hospitals, compared with 2017. The main perpetrators were former Séléka factions (36) followed by anti-balaka (6). The United Nations verified the military use of seven schools by FPRC (four), 3R (two) and anti-balaka (one).

38. A total of 62 children (28 girls, 34 boys), some as young as one, were abducted, mostly for purposes of recruitment (57). Former Séléka factions accounted for the highest number of such abductions (35) (MNLC (25); FPRC (6); MPC (2) and FPRC/MPC (2)); followed by LRA (10) and anti-balaka (9).

39. There was an increase in the number of incidents of denial of humanitarian access (120) compared with 2017 (101), which included the killing (6), injuring (23) and abduction (5) of humanitarian workers. Those incidents were predominantly perpetrated by unidentified armed individuals (57), followed by former Séléka factions (33), anti-balaka (29), and LRA (1). The Prefectures of Ouham and Nana-Grébizi were the most affected.

Developments and concerns

40. I commend the Government for fighting against impunity. Two anti-balaka leaders were arrested and transferred to the International Criminal Court for crimes including the recruitment and use of children under 15 years of age. I encourage the Special Criminal Court to prioritize crimes against children in their prosecution.

41. I welcome the signature of an action plan by MPC, on 30 May 2018, to end and prevent grave violations, and the appointment of four commanders to serve as child protection focal points, as well as the engagement with FPRC, leading to the signature of an action plan on 24 June 2019. I now urge MPC and FRPC to swiftly implement their action plans. I also call upon the leadership of UPC to adopt an action plan.

42. Dialogue with armed groups enabled the separation of 205 girls and 364 boys from FPRC (314), anti-balaka (248) and Séléka rénovée (7). In addition, 216 self-demobilized children were identified in Paoua (Ouham-Pendé Prefecture) and benefited from reintegration support from UNICEF. As part of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme initiated at the end of 2018 in Paoua, 389 children were confirmed to have been associated with both factions of Révolution et justice (RJ). However, UNICEF and partners faced challenges in implementing reintegration programmes owing to a lack of funds and

the volatile environment. I urge the Government to adopt a protocol for the handover of children associated with armed groups to child protection actors, to adopt the draft child protection code criminalizing the recruitment and use of children, to pass a decree protecting associated children from prosecution, and to consider a national prevention plan, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2427 (2018).

43. I remain deeply concerned about grave violations against children, including an increase in the killing and maiming of children and in the number of attacks against schools and hospitals by armed groups, as well as abductions attributed to former Séléka elements. I urge armed groups to immediately cease all violations and abide by their obligations under international law.

Colombia

44. The new Government took office in August 2018 and while the President, Iván Duque Márquez, affirmed his commitment to implementing the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo) (FARC-EP), he also reiterated intentions to secure a consensual modification to certain controversial parts of the Agreement. Limited implementation of the peace agreement in some regions led to frustrations among communities, and in some cases, to the strengthening of non-State armed groups in former FARC-EP areas, thus exposing children to grave violations.

45. In August, the Government conditioned continued dialogue with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) on the release of all victims of kidnapping and the cessation of criminal activity. Those conditions were not met. Negotiations were formally discontinued by the Government following the attack on the General Santander National Police Academy in January 2019, which was claimed by ELN.

46. More than 4,800 children were forcibly displaced in the Departments of Chocó, Nariño, Cauca, Antioquia, Norte de Santander, Valle del Cauca, Arauca and Boyacá owing to clashes and threats of child recruitment. According to the Government, by 31 December 2018, more than 1 million people from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had entered Colombia. Refugee and migrant children are at risk of recruitment and use and sexual violence.

Grave violations

47. A total of 120 incidents of recruitment and use, which affected 293 children, some as young as 14, were verified, a sharp increase compared with 169 children in 2017. Dissident FARC-EP groups[4] were the main perpetrators (82 children) followed by the ELN (69) and Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) also known as Clan del Golfo (12). According to the Government, 196 children (105 boys; 91 girls) who were separated from non-State armed groups entered the demobilization programme of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute in 2018.

48. The United Nations verified 89 incidents of killing and maiming, which affected 108 children, some as young as eight (34 girls, 60 boys, 14 sex unknown), a sharp increase since 2017 (53), resulting from clashes between armed groups, crossfire, bombing and anti-personnel mines. The perpetrators were unidentified armed groups (63 child casualties), ELN (14), dissident FARC-EP groups (11), AGC (8) and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) (1). There were 11 child casualties resulting from Colombian Armed Forces operations against armed groups. According to

[4] Throughout the report, dissident FARC-EP groups should be understood as including groups that did not adhere to the peace agreement and former FARC-EP repeat offenders who abandoned their commitments under the peace agreement.

government data, 22 of the child casualties in 2018 were caused by anti-personnel mines.

49. Incidents of sexual violence, which affected nine girls, were verified and attributed to dissident FARC-EP groups (five girls) and AGC (four). For example, in Putumayo Department, a 17-year-old indigenous girl was sexually abused by a member of Frente Primero, a dissident FARC-EP group, and forced to use injectable contraceptive methods.

50. A total of 13 attacks on schools and protected personnel were verified in Nariño, Norte de Santander, Chocó, Valle del Cauca and Arauca, 2 perpetrated by dissident FARC-EP groups and 11 by unidentified non-State armed groups, which disrupted school classes. Incidents included the killing of a teacher, threats and the destruction of school premises.

51. Six children aged between 14 and 16 (including three girls) were abducted by ELN (two), dissident FARC-EP groups (one) and unidentified armed elements (three).

52. Two incidents of denial of humanitarian access, perpetrated by ELN, were verified in the Department of Arauca. In one instance, ELN imposed restrictions on movement for three days and forbade any type of activity, including school classes.

Developments and concerns

53. In August 2018, Decree 1434 was issued, adopting public policy guidance on the prevention of recruitment and use of children and of sexual violence against children by non-State armed groups. I welcome this positive development and encourage the Government to strengthen institutions and programmes to prevent recruitment and use. I call on the Government to prioritize the prevention of sexual violence against children in the context of armed conflict and to ensure that perpetrators are held to account.

54. I am deeply concerned about the high number of instances of the recruitment and use of children by dissident FARC-EP groups and urge them to immediately release children and end this practice. I remain concerned by the continuing recruitment and use of children by ELN and by the increase in the killing and maiming of children by armed groups. I call upon these groups to end and prevent such violations.

55. As highlighted in my report on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/1159), I am concerned about those children included in the programme “Camino diferencial de vida” who have not yet received reparations, and about the lack of adequate resources for the programme. I urge the Government to implement a reintegration process for newly identified children, who have been released through informal processes, and to reinforce security guarantees for programme participants.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

56. The weak presence of state authority in some areas of the country, tensions linked to the delayed elections, which were held in December 2018, the multiplication and fragmentation of armed groups, intercommunal clashes between the Hema and Lendu communities in Ituri and violence in the East and the Kasais all affected children. Armed groups remained the perpetrators of the vast majority of grave violations. The United Nations documented a decrease in grave violations against children, owing mostly to the reduction of conflict in the Kasais.

Grave violations

57. A total of 631 children (91 girls, 540 boys) were recruited during 2018. Mai-Mai Mazembe (170) and Nyatura (150) accounted for half of the new recruitments, followed by other armed groups. North Kivu remained the epicentre of child recruitment and use, with more than 70 per cent of all cases, followed by the Greater Kasai region (16 per cent) and South Kivu (10 per cent). Nine children were used in support functions for periods ranging between one and two months, by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) (7 boys; 1 girl) and the Congolese National Police (1 boy), seven of whom were recruited and separated in 2018. For example, four boys were used by FARDC to carry looted goods for five days in Ituri, while one boy was used by the Congolese National Police in Shabunda Territory to perform police duties.

58. A total of 2,253 children (including 267 girls) were separated from 39 parties to conflict, including Nyatura (532), Mai-Mai Mazembe (417), Kamuina Nsapu (335), Raia Mutomboki (175), Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi (FDLR-FOCA) (128), Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové (NDC-Rénové) (75) and Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) and Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (57 each). Almost half of the children were below the age of 15 when recruited (1,067) and 45 per cent were used as combatants (1,014). Following United Nations advocacy, 25 per cent of those children were voluntarily released by the commanders of armed groups.

59. Some 125 children (including six girls) were deprived of liberty by Government forces, owing to their alleged association with armed groups, and were released after periods ranging from 3 to 48 days. In addition, 21 boys who were arrested for their suspected association with Kamuina Nsapu, some since September 2016, continued to be detained in Kananga prison, Kasai Province.

60. There were 169 child casualties, with 77 killed (39 girls, 38 boys) and 92 maimed (29 girls, 63 boys). Of those casualties, 36 were attributed to FARDC (33) and the Congolese National Police (3), mostly in the context of operations in the east. The remaining casualties were attributed to armed groups, including Kamuina Nsapu (45) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) (9), to unidentified armed elements (47), and 18 were caused by unexploded ordnance.

61. Sexual violence affected 277 girls in North Kivu (107), the Kasais (55), Ituri (36), South Kivu (31), Tanganyika (11) and other provinces (37). Government forces were responsible for 50 per cent of the cases, including FARDC (85), the Congolese National Police (51) and Agence nationale de renseignements (ANR) (5), more than double the number attributed to government forces in 2017. Eight suspected perpetrators were arrested and await trial, while five were given sanctions by their hierarchy. Other perpetrators included Nyatura (24), Raia Mutomboki (17), Conseil national de la résistance pour la démocratie (CNRD), FRPI and unidentified Mai-Mai groups (14 each), Mai-Mai Mazembe (8) and Kamuina Nsapu (7).

62. A total of 87 attacks on schools and 10 attacks on hospitals were verified, a significant decrease since 2017, which is explained by the reduction in violence in the Kasais, where institutions were no longer targeted. Most attacks occurred in the context of intercommunal clashes in Djugu Territory, Ituri (75). In total, 43 schools (42) and hospitals (1) were deliberately burned or damaged, another 51 schools (42) and hospitals (9) were looted and school personnel were attacked (3). Armed groups were responsible for most of the attacks. Three attacks were attributed to FARDC.

63. Three schools and one hospital used for military purposes by FARDC (3) and Nyatura (1) in North Kivu (3) and the Kasais (1) were vacated following United Nations advocacy.

64. The number of abductions decreased to 367 (270 boys; 97 girls) and occurred mainly in North Kivu (291), South Kivu (51) and the Kasais (17). Main perpetrators included Nyatura (91), Mai-Mai Mazembe (69), ADF (47), Raia Mutomboki (46), FDLR-FOCA (24), CNRD (14) and Kamuina Nsapu (10). Seven girls and one boy were abducted by FARDC mostly for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Children were mostly abducted for the purpose of recruitment (209). A total of 62 children were subjected to sexual violence during their association. In addition, a total of 151 children (95 girls; 56 boys), who have been abducted by the Bana Mura militia in the Kasai region since 2017 and subjected to forced labour and sexual violence, remain in captivity while 62 children (41 girls; 21 boys) returned to their families. United Nations advocacy with the Government for the release of the remaining abductees yielded limited results.

65. Four incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children were verified, all in South Kivu. For example, Raia Mutomboki attacked and abducted aid workers, hindering the distribution of vaccines to at least 5,000 children. Other incidents involved attacks by unidentified armed elements on humanitarian convoys carrying health supplies. However, the volatile security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo affected tens of thousands of children and hindered the environment in which humanitarian personnel operate.

Developments and concerns

66. I welcome the screening to determine the age of children during FARDC recruitment campaigns, as a result of which 146 children were separated before their enrolment. Standard operating procedures for age assessment screening were continuously disseminated across the FARDC and PNC.

67. The United Nations increased its efforts to encourage armed groups to cease grave violations. Eight armed group commanders signed a unilateral declaration committing to end and prevent child recruitment and use, as well as other grave violations. Awareness-raising sessions regarding grave violations were conducted with focal points from nine armed groups and community mediators. As armed groups lay down their arms, I urge the Government to ensure that protection and screening measures are in place to identify and separate children and ensure their access to reintegration services.

68. The United Nations supported the implementation of the 2009 Child Protection Act, punishing child recruitment by up to 10 years' imprisonment, including through support to military justice, lawyers and non-governmental organizations. For the first time, two armed groups commanders were sentenced to life in prison for charges including child recruitment. The trial of Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, former commander of Nduma défense du Congo-Sheka, and two of his commanders, on charges of war crimes, including child recruitment and use, and sexual violence, started in November 2018. Child victims and witnesses were identified, with support from the United Nations for those efforts.

69. I commend the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for sustaining the gains of its action plan on child recruitment and use, but I am concerned by the persistent number of violations involving sexual violence being committed by security forces and call upon the Government to expedite aspects of the plan relating to sexual violence against children. I urge the Government to ensure that perpetrators of grave violations are held accountable and to prioritize the prevention of violations against children. Moreover, I call upon the Government to ensure that the children abducted by the Bana Mura militia since 2017 are immediately released and returned to their families.

Iraq

70. The security situation in the country improved following the military defeat of ISIL in late 2017, resulting in improved access for the monitoring and verifying of grave violations, including those which occurred prior to 2018. Despite the loss of territory, ISIL continued to pose a threat to security forces and civilians, including children, by carrying out deadly attacks in Ninawa, Kirkuk, Anbar, Diyala and Baghdad. Demonstrations, which resulted in violent incidents, including killing and arson, were verified.

Grave violations

71. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 39 children by parties to conflict, including five boys between the ages of 12 and 15, used by the Iraqi Federal Police in Ninawa Governorate to fortify a checkpoint, and one 15-year-old boy used by ISIL in Anbar Governorate to drive a car bomb into Fallujah city. In addition, 33 Yazidi boys between the ages of 15 and 17 were rescued after being abducted in Iraq in 2014 by ISIL and trained and deployed to fight in the Syrian Arab Republic.

72. As of December, at least 902 children (850 boys and 52 girls) between the ages of 15 and 18 remained in detention on national security-related charges, including for their actual and alleged association with armed groups, primarily ISIL.

73. The United Nations verified the killing (48) and maiming (84) of 132 children (105 boys, 27 girls), an 82 per cent decrease compared with 2017, mainly due to a significant reduction in military operations against ISIL. A number of casualties were attributed to ISIL (38) and the Iraqi Security Forces (1), while responsibility could not be attributed for the remaining casualties.

74. Almost half of the child casualties (61) were caused by explosive remnants of war found mainly in areas previously under ISIL control, in the Governorates of Ninawa, Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din. Among those casualties, 28 child casualties resulted from improvised explosive devices, including children used for carrying and detonating improvised explosive devices, and 19 resulted from indirect attacks with small arms and light weapons, mainly in Ninawa, Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din. Among the remaining casualties, 16 child casualties were a result of targeted killings and ill-treatment. In addition, two explosions in weapons and ammunition storage facilities belonging to popular mobilization forces (PMF) occurred near or in residential areas, in Karbala' and Salah al-Din governorates, injuring eight children.

75. As a result of stigma and fear of retribution, among other issues, the United Nations did not verify any cases of sexual violence against children.

76. The United Nations verified 24 attacks on schools (21) and hospitals (3). All attacks on schools resulted from crossfire between ISF and ISIL during 2016 and 2017, in areas that only became accessible for verification in 2018, mainly in Kirkuk Governorate. The three attacks against hospitals and medical personnel were attributed to ISIL and comprised the killing of one member of medical staff in Diyala, an attack on a medical centre in Kirkuk and the looting of supplies from Dara medical centre in Kirkuk.

77. A total of 48 incidents of the military use of schools by ISIL were verified in areas previously under ISIL control in Kirkuk, between 2014 and 2017, which became accessible for verification in 2018. Of concern was also the temporary presence of members of the Iraqi Security Forces inside schools in Ninawa, Salah al-Din and Diyala, prior to and during the election period, to provide security to the Independent High Electoral Commission.

78. The United Nations verified two abductions of children. In one incident, a 16-year-old girl was abducted by an unidentified armed man in Mosul. In the other case, a 14-year-old Yazidi girl was abducted by ISIL in 2015 and later sold. Both girls were rescued by the Iraqi Security Forces in 2018.

79. While no incident of denial of humanitarian access was verified in 2018, humanitarian actors faced bureaucratic impediments, which translated into restriction of movement. Families with perceived affiliation with ISIL continued to face challenges in obtaining the necessary security clearance to gain access to basic services, including education and health, as well as restrictions on their freedom of movement to leave areas or camp settings in order to seek medical assistance.

Developments and concerns

80. I welcome the ongoing discussions with the Government of Iraq on developing an action plan to prevent child recruitment and use by PMF and encourage its forces' screening. I call on the InterMinisterial Committee on Monitoring and Reporting to resume regular consultations with the United Nations in order to proceed with its signature and implementation.

81. I welcome the release of 40 boys by tribal armed groups, with the support of the United Nations, which assisted in their reintegration.

82. I am deeply concerned about the situation of children held in detention on security-related charges and emphasize the need to treat children primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards. I further call for detention to be a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time, and for the respect of due process. The restriction of movement imposed on civilians with suspected links to ISIL in camps for internally displaced persons is of concern, as is their physical security upon return to their areas of origin. I reiterate the willingness of the United Nations to support the Government in prioritizing the reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to conflict.

83. I call upon all countries concerned to facilitate the repatriation of foreign women and children actually and allegedly affiliated with ISIL, in line with the guiding principle of non-refoulement and with respect for the best interests of the child.

Israel and State of Palestine

84. Palestinian and Israeli children continued to be severely affected by the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In 2018, the United Nations verified the highest number of Palestinian children killed (59) and injured (2,756) since 2014. Six Israeli children were verified as having been injured.

Grave violations

85. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of three 17-year-old boys in Gaza (two) and the West Bank (one) by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's al-Quds Brigades, Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades and an unidentified Palestinian armed group (one each). The United Nations received testimony from three children, between the ages of 15 and 16, that Israeli forces attempted to recruit them as informants.

86. As of December, 203 Palestinian children were held over security offences by the Israeli forces, including 114 in pretrial detention and/or being detained during trial, and 87 serving a sentence. The United Nations received affidavits from 127 Palestinian boys who, during interviews with the United Nations, reported ill-treatment and breaches of due process during their arrest, transfer and detention. The United Nations documented four cases of the administrative detention of Palestinian children in 2018.

87. A total of 59 Palestinian children (57 boys, 2 girls), some as young as 18 months old, were killed in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem (8) and Gaza (51), with most of the casualties attributed to Israeli forces (56) and one to an Israeli settler. In addition, one child was killed by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's al-Quds Brigades, and one boy was killed by an improvised explosive device accidentally detonated at his home by his father, an Al-Aqsa Brigade member. Of these 59 children, 33 boys and 1 girl were killed by Israeli forces during demonstrations at the Gaza fence, 88 per cent of whom (30) were shot by live ammunition to the upper body, while reportedly posing no imminent threat of death or serious injury to Israeli forces, and another 2 boys died after being struck in the head by tear gas canisters. Three children were killed by Israeli forces air strikes in Gaza. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, eight boys were killed by Israeli forces, five of whom were shot during demonstrations and clashes.

88. The United Nations verified that 2,756 Palestinian children were injured (2,514 boys, 242 girls) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, an increase compared with 2017 (1,160), owing to injuries sustained during the Great March of Return. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 1,421 were injured by Israeli forces (1,398) and settlers (23) in the context of demonstrations, clashes and search and arrest operations, including 988 injured as a result of inhaling tear gas, subsequently requiring medical treatment. Three boys were injured while committing or allegedly attempting to commit stabbing attacks against Israelis. In Gaza, 1,335 child casualties were attributed to Israeli forces, 1,276 of whom were injured between March and December during demonstrations at the Gaza fence, 62 per cent injured by live ammunition (629) or shrapnel (167) and 35 per cent by tear gas inhalation (443). Twenty children had limbs amputated.

89. Six Israeli children were injured, including two girls injured in their home by a rocket fired indiscriminately by a Palestinian armed group.

90. Two schools in Gaza were damaged during ground attacks by Israeli forces, and a further four schools were damaged during air strikes by Israeli forces. A mortar launched by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza exploded in the yard of a kindergarten near Sderot, a town located in southern Israel. No injuries were reported in connection with those attacks.

91. The United Nations verified 118 incidents of interference with education in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by Israeli forces (113) and Israeli settlers (5), affecting 23,188 children. Among those were two verified incidents of the military use of a school by Israeli forces. More than half of verified interferences involved Israeli forces firing live ammunition, tear gas or sound grenades in and around schools, mostly in the context of clashes or military operations. Of particular concern is the fact that Israeli forces did not always intervene when settlers entered Urif village and attacked the secondary school. Attacks on the school in Urif have been verified since 2012.

92. Conflict escalations also caused significant disruptions to children's education in Gaza and southern Israel, when schools were closed for the safety of students and educators as a result of air strikes by Israeli forces and indiscriminate rocket fire by Palestinian armed groups. For example, school closures affected an estimated 63,000 children in southern Israel and 637,195 children in Gaza during escalations of conflict on 12 and 13 November.

93. Three health facilities were damaged in Israeli forces air strikes. Three members of medical personnel were killed and a further 553 injured by Israeli forces, including 375 by tear gas inhalation, while providing medical services during Gaza demonstrations. Seven interferences with health services were documented in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, due to Israeli forces incursions into or clashes

near health facilities, as well as attacks by Israeli settlers on medical vehicles and personnel.

94. With respect to applications to Israeli authorities for children to cross into Israel for medical treatment outside Gaza, approval for 24 per cent of such applications was reported as having been delayed, affecting 1,079 boys and 689 girls. Applications on behalf of children injured in Gaza demonstrations were approved at a very low rate (22 per cent approval compared with the average of 75 per cent for other cases involving children).

Developments and concerns

95. I am extremely concerned by the significant rise in the maiming of and injuries caused to children across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including by tear gas inhalation requiring medical treatment. I request my Special Representative to further examine the cases of maiming and injuries caused by Israeli forces, and urge Israel to immediately put in place preventive and protective measures to end the excessive use of force. I reiterate my call upon Israel to uphold international juvenile justice standards, as well as to cease the use of administrative detention for children and end all forms of ill-treatment in detention, and to cease any attempted recruitment of detained children as informants.

96. I urge all parties to apply all feasible measures to ensure the protection of and care for children affected by armed conflict and to refrain from the excessive use of force. I call on all parties to engage constructively with the United Nations to prevent future violations.

97. I urge all Palestinian actors to refrain from encouraging children's participation in violence. I call upon the al-Quds and al-Qassam Brigades to immediately cease the recruitment and use of children, and I further request my Special Representative to further examine recruitment and use by armed groups.

Lebanon

98. Armed clashes in camps for Palestinian refugees, sporadic armed violence and the presence of mines and other explosive devices negatively affected children throughout the country.

Grave violations

99. The recruitment and use of children by armed groups continued, with 22 children (21 boys, 1 girl) verified as associated with the Ansarullah Movement (Ansar Allah) (5), Hizbullah (1) or unidentified militia (16). They were mostly used as guards or in support roles, for carrying weapons or food. For example, five boys associated with Ansar Allah, between the ages of 14 and 17, were trained to use weapons, wore military uniforms and held Kalashnikov rifles in Mieh Mieh camp for Palestinian refugees in Sidon in October.

100. Children continued to be arrested and prosecuted in relation to terrorism charges as part of military justice processes, with 20 new arrests in 2018 for alleged association with ISIL. As of December, 16 children remained in detention on such charges, 9 of whom were in pretrial detention and 7 of whom were detained following sentencing.

101. A total of 14 child casualties (13 boys, 1 girl) were verified, resulting from unattributed mine explosions (6) or crossfire (8), mainly in North Biqa', Akkar and the south.

102. Marking an increase compared with 2017, five United Nations facilities in Palestinian refugee camps (3 schools, 2 health centres) sustained damage from crossfire between armed actors in three camps for Palestinian refugees. For example, two schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) were damaged by shrapnel in Ein El Hilweh in October. In addition, armed clashes in camps for Palestinian refugees disrupted educational activities in UNRWA schools, with more than 11,000 students deprived of at least one day of school in Ein El Hilweh and Shatila camps and over 400 students deprived of 20 consecutive school days in Mieh Mieh camp. Two United Nations clinics had to close for 2 days and 19 days in Shatila and Mieh Mieh camps, respectively, affecting approximately 200 patients a day.

Developments and concerns

103. I am concerned about armed clashes in camps for Palestinian refugees and about the recruitment and use of children. I am also concerned about attacks on schools and the impact thereof on children's well-being and access to education. I reiterate my call for the Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Children associated with armed groups should be treated primarily as victims, detained only as a last resort and for the shortest possible period of time, and be promptly referred to reintegration programmes. I call on armed groups to immediately cease the recruitment and use of children.

Libya

104. The ceasefire agreement brokered by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) in September 2018 led to a decrease in hostilities in Tripoli. However, sporadic fighting continued in parts of Libya and children fell victim to indiscriminate attacks, including during exchanges of crossfire in densely populated areas. The lack of access for monitoring actors, owing to the security situation, severely inhibited the verification of grave violations against children.

Grave violations

105. The United Nations received reports of the increased recruitment and use of children, yet information could not be verified owing to security and access restrictions. Communities are also believed not to have reported incidents, out of fear of repercussions.

106. Children were deprived of liberty by the Libyan National Army for their alleged association with the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) in the context of clashes in the oil crescent region. The United Nations also received reports of refugee and migrant children held by criminal networks allegedly associated with armed groups.

107. The United Nations verified the killing (30) and maiming (44) of 74 children by unidentified armed elements. Child casualties resulted from air strikes, shelling in urban areas, small arms fire as well as from improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance, mainly in Tripoli, Benghazi and in southern Libya. Children fell victim to clashes, including between the Libyan National Army and the Darnah Protection Force (DPF) in Darnah, between the Libyan National Army and PFG forces in the oil crescent region, and between tribal groups in Sabha.

108. The United Nations was unable to verify any case of sexual violence against children. However, refugee and migrant children were reportedly subjected to sexual abuse, including forced prostitution and sexual exploitation, in conditions that could amount to sexual slavery, by traffickers or criminal networks allegedly associated with armed groups.

109. The United Nations verified attacks on schools (5) and hospitals (37), mostly in the context of clashes between armed groups including shelling and crossfire, including in Sabha, Darnah and Tripoli. Attacks on schools were attributed to Ahmad al-Dabbashi (1) and the Abu Salim brigade (1) while three remained unattributed. The attacks on hospitals, all of which were unattributed, included the killing and maiming of 12 members of health-care personnel and of three patients.

110. While no incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, humanitarian actors in Libya continued to face restrictions, including administrative and bureaucratic impediments in providing humanitarian assistance to civilians, including children, who were also denied access to appropriate health care.

Developments and concerns

111. I welcome the collaboration between the United Nations and local authorities in the area of Zintan on the reintegration of children and the engagement with armed groups to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. I urge all parties to engage with the United Nations to strengthen the protection and the prevention of violations against children.

112. I am deeply concerned about the levels of child casualties, often owing to indiscriminate shelling and crossfire in urban areas. The abuse of refugee and migrant children, including through trafficking, deprivation of liberty and sexual abuse, is abhorrent and I call upon the Government of National Accord to swiftly act to protect children and prevent them from being subjected to these violations.

Mali

113. The security situation in northern and central Mali remained volatile, marked by military operations and attacks by armed groups against Malian Defence and Security Forces, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and armed groups signatories to the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting in civilian casualties. The Central region was caught in a spiral of violence with the rise of self-defence groups and intercommunal conflict triggering killings and forced displacement, as well as affecting children's welfare. Previously peaceful western regions also witnessed instability.

Grave violations

114. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 109 boys and 5 girls. The main perpetrators were Platform (57) (including the Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés (GATIA) (27), Ganda Lassale Izo (24) and other Platform members (6)), and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) (23) (including the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) (12), the Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (9) and other CMA members (2)). At least 31 children were used as combatants, 3 of whom were children between the ages of 14 and 17 who were associated with Congrès pour la justice dans l'Azawad and were killed by CMA at a checkpoint in Timbuktu region.

115. A total of 13 boys arrested by the Malian Defence and Security Forces for their alleged association with armed groups or on national security charges were released after between 5 days and 60 days in detention, including 5 boys who were ill-treated while detained. Three other children were deprived of their liberty in Ménaka by GATIA, the Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad (MSA) and by joint GATIA/MSA forces (one each).

116. A total of 77 children (13 girls, 64 boys) were killed and 52 maimed (16 girls, 36 boys) as a result of intercommunal conflict, crossfire, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war. Responsibility for the majority of the child casualties could not be attributed, except for 16 casualties attributed to the Group of Support to Islam and Muslims (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin) (GSIM) and another 16 to traditional hunters of Dan Na Ambassagou. The regions most affected were Mopti and Gao.

117. Sexual violence continued to be highly underreported. A total of 20 girls between the ages of 12 and 17 were victims of rape and sexual violence perpetrated by unidentified armed groups (18), Forces armées maliennes and GATIA (1 each).

118. A total of 81 attacks on schools were verified, which doubled from the number verified in 2017 (41). The responsibility for most incidents was unattributed, except for two attacks perpetrated by GSIM. At least 40 schools closed following direct threats made to teachers. Other incidents included the burning of schools and physical attacks on school personnel. The most affected regions were Mopti (50) and Koulikoro (20) in the centre and the west/south of the country. As of December, 827 schools remained closed, leaving more than 244,000 children with no access to education. The United Nations verified 21 attacks against hospitals, all unattributed, in Mopti (12), Timbuktu (7) and Gao (2) regions, involving abductions of protected personnel and the carjacking of health centres' vehicles and ambulances.

119. Eight boys and one girl were abducted by unidentified traditional hunters (two), Islamic State in Greater Sahara and GATIA (one each) and unidentified armed groups (five). The girl abducted by GATIA in Gao region was subjected to sexual violence.

120. A total of 170 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, the responsibility for which was unattributed except for incidents attributed to Dan Na Ambassagou (two), GATIA and Malian Defence and Security Forces (one each). Most incidents occurred in Timbuktu (41), Gao (36), Mopti (30), Kidal (26) and Ménaka (24) regions resulting in the disruption of the provision of humanitarian assistance to children, such as health care, vaccination and food distribution.

Developments and concerns

121. Following the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration in February, I encourage the Government to continue its implementation, including the mapping of schools closed as a result of direct threats and insecurity

122. A joint United Nations-CMA-Government coordination mechanism was established for the implementation of the 2017 action plan. However, the implementation has been slow, and I am concerned by the continued recruitment and use of children. I urge CMA to implement the action plan without delay. In 2018, 102 boys and 5 girls formerly associated with armed groups received reintegration support from UNICEF and partners.

123. The United Nations continued engagement with French forces from Operation Barkhane on the protection of children during military operations. Twelve children captured by Barkhane during military operations were handed over to civilian child protection actors. Three children captured by MINUSMA were transferred to the Gendarmerie before their handover to civilian authorities. Dialogue was initiated with the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel to mainstream child protection in their operations. I welcome the adoption of a compliance framework by the Joint Force and encourage the Force to implement the child protection aspects therein, including the handover of children.

124. In the framework of the accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and integration process in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, nine individuals,

who were presumed to be children, were identified during the screening of combatants but were not released, as they presented adult identity cards, which had been issued a few days prior to the screening. I am concerned by these reports and urge all parties to facilitate the immediate and unconditional release of all associated children. I am also concerned by the increasing number of child casualties, in particular resulting from an intercommunal conflict in central Mali, including by Dan Na Ambassagou, which further deteriorated in early 2019. I am concerned about the continuing high numbers of children recruited and used by the Platform and urge it to develop an action plan with the support of the United Nations to release children and end this practice.

Myanmar

125. Armed conflict continued to take place both between the Tatmadaw and armed groups, and among armed groups, notably in Shan, Kachin and Rakhine States. In the last quarter of the year, fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army intensified in central Rakhine and southern Chin States. Attacks by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army elements against Government forces were also registered. This resulted in the continuous displacement of civilians across the two states. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, half of whom are children, remained in Rakhine State, and those displaced in Shan and Kachin States continue to face serious hardships.

Grave violations

126. The United Nations verified 7 children having been recruited and 64 children having been used by the Tatmadaw in 2018. In addition, the past recruitment of 26 boys by the Tatmadaw was verified in 2018.

127. The United Nations verified 11 incidents of the recruitment and use of 17 children (14 boys and 3 girls) by armed groups. Nine incidents were attributed to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), one to Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and one to Karen National Liberation Army. In addition, two incidents were documented involving United Wa State Army (UWSA).

128. The United Nations documented the detention of five suspected minors, who had been recruited by the Tatmadaw and held for desertion, and advocated their release. They were placed on light duty in their regiments, pending assessment of their ages. In addition, despite United Nations advocacy, an appeal remains ongoing regarding the charges against the former child soldier Aung Ko Htwe, who was forcibly recruited by the Tatmadaw in 2005 and sentenced to two years imprisonment for sharing his experience with the media. As of December, he remained in detention. Furthermore, the United Nations sent 12 advocacy letters to the Tatmadaw regarding the assignment to the front lines of 11 suspected minors, who were returned to rear bases, pending verification of their ages.

129. The United Nations verified 34 incidents of the killing and maiming of children, resulting in the death of 16 children and injury to 39 children, mainly caused by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices (24), crossfire (4), air strikes by the Tatmadaw (2), gunshots by Border Guard Police (BGP) (2) and unidentified elements (1), and mortar shells launched by an unknown armed element (1).

130. The United Nations documented eight incidents of attacks against schools (five) and hospitals (three) in Kachin (six) and Shan (two) States, attributed to Tatmadaw (two), KIA (two), Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) (one) and unidentified elements (three).

131. The United Nations received 32 reports of the military use of schools (30) and hospitals (2) in Rakhine (30) and Kachin (2) States, attributed to the Tatmadaw (21), BGP (7), and jointly to the Tatmadaw and BGP (4). In one incident in Kachin State, a hospital was used as a military base for 13 days, denying the local population access thereto.

132. The United Nations verified three incidents of abduction affecting nine boys, attributed to Tatmadaw (two) and KIA (one). Another six incidents were documented reportedly affecting 36 children, attributed to the KIA (four), the TNLA (one) and the UWSA (one).

133. Humanitarian access, particularly in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States, continued to deteriorate. International humanitarian organizations have not been able to deliver relief supplies in areas beyond the Government's control since 2016 owing to denial of travel authorizations.

Developments and concerns

134. I am encouraged by the Government's formation of an interministerial committee to prevent all six grave violations and discuss action plans on ending and preventing sexual violence and killing and maiming, following their listing in my previous report, and hope for progress in granting access to conflict-affected areas of Myanmar and holding perpetrators accountable. I reiterate my call for the Government to fully comply with and to finalize action plans on ending and preventing the two remaining violations, with the United Nations, as a priority and encourage the Government to adopt a law on child rights. I remain concerned about the ongoing recruitment and use of children and detention of children by the Government.

135. In 2018, the United Nations engaged with all listed armed groups, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, except for UWSA, and commitments are being sought from RCSS/SSA, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council and Karen National Union. I strongly encourage listed parties to remain engaged with the United Nations in adopting concrete commitments, and to take action to prevent and address the recruitment of children with immediate effect.

136. During her visit to Myanmar in May 2018, my Special Representative stressed to the Government the need for accelerated implementation of the joint action plan on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children. She urged the Government to ensure no new violations would occur with respect to child recruitment and use, to expedite the age assessment of recruits, to release suspected minors whose cases are pending, and to cease the detention of children for desertion or for being absent without leave. Though efforts are under way, full compliance is yet to be achieved and aggravated cases of new recruitment occurred in 2018, with no progress on accountability. However, 75 children and young people recruited as children were released from the Tatmadaw in 2018 and there has been steady progress in addressing the backlog of cases from previous years.

137. I am concerned about the levels of recruitment and use, and of the killing and maiming of children, notably caused by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, and condemn grave violations committed by all parties.

Somalia

138. The political and security situation in Somalia was marked by tensions between the Federal Government of Somalia and federal member states, with the latter

breaking off relations with the Federal Government in September. The situation improved from December onwards, when the Federal Government engaged federal member states to normalize relations. Al-Shabaab continued its attacks against the Somali National Army and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and used improvised explosive devices against civilians, often with children as victims. In 2018, the number of children affected by grave violations increased by 23 per cent compared with 2017.

Grave violations

139. A total of 2,228 boys and 72 girls, some as young as 8, were recruited and used by parties to conflict. The recruitment of children by Al-Shabaab significantly increased (1,865) compared with 2017 as the group sustained its recruitment drive, including by forcing clan elders and parents to provide children or face reprisal. Other perpetrators included the Somali National Army (155), Somali police (93), Galmudug forces (67), Jubbaland forces (56), clan militias (24), Puntland forces (20) and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ) (14).

140. The detention of children for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab remained a serious concern, with 360 boys and 15 girls affected. Children were detained by the Somali National Army (168), Somali police (145), Jubbaland forces (20), National Intelligence and Security Agency (18), Galmudug forces and AMISOM (3 each), clan militia and "Somaliland" elements (2 each) and ASWJ (1). Al-Shabaab held 13 children for failing to respect their rules.

141. A total of 781 boys and 260 girls were killed and maimed by Al-Shabaab (437), unidentified armed elements (344), Somali National Army (113), clan militias (36), Somali police (26), Jubbaland forces (24), Galmudug forces (19), AMISOM (15), Southwest forces (10), unidentified air strikes (8), Puntland forces (6), Ethiopian Liyu Police, Ethiopian National Defence Forces and Kenya Defence Forces (1 each). Most child casualties resulted from crossfire, targeted killings, aerial bombardments, improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks.

142. The United Nations verified incidents of sexual violence affecting 328 girls and 3 boys, attributed to unidentified armed elements (114), Somali National Army (50), Al-Shabaab (46), clan militias (42), Jubbaland forces (31), Galmudug forces (14), Somali police (13), Southwest forces (10), Ethiopian Liyu Police (6), Puntland forces (3), and Ethiopian National Defence Forces (2).

143. A total of 77 attacks on schools were verified, the majority (61) attributed to Al-Shabaab. Incidents included killing, abduction and threats against teachers, destruction and looting. On 9 June, a Koranic school teacher was forced to leave Galharur village, Aden Yabal district, Shabelle Dhexe Region, after receiving threats for not teaching according to Al-Shabaab's curriculum. A total of 14 attacks on hospitals were verified and attributed to Al-Shabaab (7), Galmudug forces (4) and unidentified armed elements, clan militias and the Somali National Army (1 each).

144. A total of 1,609 children (1,479 boys, 130 girls), some as young as 8, were verified as abducted, 97 per cent of them by Al-Shabaab (1,590) mainly for the purpose of recruitment and use. On 13 October, three boys between the ages of 11 and 16 were abducted by Al-Shabaab from a local madrasa in Howlwadaag village, Bu'aale district, Juba Dhexe Region. The children were taken to a training facility for indoctrination and subsequent recruitment.

145. A total of 74 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified by the United Nations, a sharp increase from 2017 (37). Most incidents were attributed to Al-Shabaab (41).

Developments and concerns

146. The Federal Government elaborated a road map to expedite the implementation of the two action plans signed in 2012. I welcome this positive development and call for its swift implementation by all Government security forces, including the Somali National Army and the Somali police. I also commend the drafting of the Child Rights Bill, which incorporates the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law, and urge its speedy enactment. The Sexual Offence Bill is also a positive development and I call for its enactment.

147. I welcome the decree signed by the President of Puntland on 20 August pardoning 34 children who had previously received heavy sentences and been imprisoned since 2016 for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab.

148. During 2018, 74 children were released from the Puntland forces, 17 of whom separated during the screening of those Forces earmarked for integration into the Somali National Army. In addition, the Somali National Army rescued 36 boys, some as young as 7, from an Al-Shabaab training centre in Shabelle Hoose Region. All children were handed over to UNICEF and partners for reintegration support. Overall, 1,179 children formerly associated with armed forces and groups received reintegration support in 2018.

149. I am very concerned by the increase in the recruitment and use, and killing and maiming of children, and in the number of children who have been subjected to sexual violence, the perpetration of which is attributed to the Somali National Army and the Somali police. I am also preoccupied by the steady increase in grave violations by regional forces, in particular Galmudug and Jubbaland forces, and strongly encourage them to engage with the United Nations to end and prevent violations.

150. I remain severely concerned by the increased recruitment and use, and the continuous abductions of children by Al-Shabaab. I call upon all parties to immediately cease and prevent all violations against children. I also remain concerned by the detention of children for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab and call on authorities to treat these children primarily as victims, to prioritize their reintegration in line with their best interests, and to respect due process and international juvenile justice standards.

South Sudan

151. The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan in September 2018 resulted in a decrease in hostilities and a slight improvement in humanitarian access to children. However, the parties made modest progress on the implementation of the peace agreement and spikes in abductions and sexual violence against children were noted after the signing of the agreement. The greater Equatoria region remained the epicentre of grave violations with 50 per cent of the total number of incidents.

Grave violations

152. The United Nations verified 102 incidents of recruitment or use affecting 453 children (365 boys, 88 girls), 14 per cent of whom were under 15 years of age at the time of their recruitment. Almost half of the cases were attributed to the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM) (224 children), followed by the pro-Machar Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) (84) and the National Salvation Front (NAS) (2), with some cases relating to children who had been recruited in previous years. Close to 30 per cent of the children were recruited and used by Government Security Forces (143), including the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) (94), Taban Deng-allied SSPDF (46), the South Sudan

National Police Service (SSNPS) (2) and the National Prison Service of South Sudan (NPSSS) (1). In addition, 955 children were released by the SSNLM (629), Taban Deng-allied SSPDF (318) and NAS (8).

153. A total of 125 children (69 boys, 45 girls, 11 sex unknown) were verified as having been killed and maimed by Government Security Forces (75), including the SSPDF (66), the SSNPS (8) and the South Sudan National Fire Brigade (1). The pro-Machar SPLA-IO was responsible for the killing and maiming of five children. Fifteen children were affected by crossfire between SSPDF and pro-Machar SPLA-IO, and crossfire between the South Sudan National Movement for Change (SSNMC) and pro-Machar SPLA-IO affected seven children. Children also continued to be affected by unexploded ordnance (23).

154. A total of 72 children, including 1 boy, were subjected to sexual violence, 33 of whom were under 15 years of age and 8 of whom were gang-raped. The majority of cases were attributed to the Government Security Forces (57), including SSPDF (47 children, including 1 boy), SSNPS (6), Taban Deng-allied SSPDF (2), and to NPSSS and the National Security Service (1 each). The pro-Machar SPLA-IO was responsible for perpetrating sexual violence against 14 girls and responsibility for one case was attributed to unidentified armed elements. In addition, a spike in cases of sexual violence in northern Unity was reported by the United Nations in the last quarter of 2018.

155. A total of 30 attacks on schools (18) and hospitals (12) were verified and attributed to Government Security Forces (11), including SSPDF (10) and the Taban Deng-allied SSPDF (1), as well as to pro-Machar SPLA-IO (15), NAS (1) and to crossfire incidents between SSPDF and pro-Machar SPLA-IO (3). Attacks predominantly involved the destruction and looting of educational or medical facilities.

156. In addition, 33 schools (26) and hospitals (7) were used for military purposes, the majority by Government Security Forces (27), including SSPDF (25) and Taban Deng-allied SSPDF (2), followed by pro-Machar SPLA-IO (5) and SSNMC (1).

157. A total of 109 children (49 boys, 51 girls, 9 sex unknown) were verified as having been abducted. The pro-Machar SPLA-IO was responsible for a large majority of those cases (92), often for the purpose of rape and other forms of sexual violence and for the recruitment and use of children. SSPDF was responsible for the abduction of 17 children.

158. A total of 14 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified in a context that continued to be challenging for humanitarian actors Incidents were attributed to pro-Machar SPLA-IO (10), SSPDF (3), and NAS (1) and involved attacks, the abduction of humanitarian personnel and the looting of humanitarian aid intended for children. For instance, in April 2018, pro-Machar SPLA-IO held 10 humanitarian workers for five days in Central Equatoria.

Developments and concerns

159. I welcome South Sudan's accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in September 2018, following the mission of my Special Representative to South Sudan, and the release of 955 children (including 317 girls) by armed groups that integrated SSPDF in 2018, including Taban Deng-allied SSPDF and SSNLM. I am encouraged by the willingness of the Government to engage with the United Nations on the development of a comprehensive action plan for ending and preventing all grave violations against children. The elaboration of a draft, together with the United Nations, in February 2019 is a welcome first step and I encourage the Government

and allied parties to finalize the action plan without delay. Within the framework of the existing action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use, signed in 2012 and recommitted to in 2014, the SSPDF appointed child protection focal points across its divisions, organized trainings on child protection jointly with the United Nations and granted access for the United Nations to conduct screenings in Bentiu military barracks.

160. I am seriously concerned about the ongoing impunity for violations against children and urge the Government to ensure accountability, in particular for sexual violence. I urge the Government to ensure that the protection of children is addressed in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement, including by ensuring that crimes against children are not amnestied. I further urge the Government to cease attacks on schools and the military use thereof, in line with its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration. In addition, I am extremely concerned about the increase in abductions, often for the purpose of sexual violence and recruitment, and urge the pro-Machar SPLA-IO faction to engage with the United Nations on the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and the killing and maiming of children signed in 2016.

The Sudan

161. While fighting subsided in large parts of Darfur, sporadic clashes between Government forces and the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW) continued in the Jebel Marra area, resulting in the displacement of civilians and in an upsurge in killing and maiming of children, the number of children subjected to sexual violence and in the number of children abducted. Progress in implementing the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur remained limited, as did political dialogue between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM/N). While unilateral ceasefires were extended in Blue Nile, Southern Kordofan and Darfur, violations were reported in the Blue Nile, as were clashes between factions of SPLM/N. The ability of the United Nations to monitor and report on grave violations was hampered by access restrictions and reduced child protection capacity.

Grave violations: Darfur

162. No cases of the recruitment and use of children were verified in 2018, although allegations thereof were received.

163. The United Nations verified a total of 77 incidents of killing and maiming affecting 186 children (121 boys, 65 girls), a 27 per cent increase compared with 2017 (146). Child casualties were attributed to Government Security Forces (98), including the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) (33), the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) (57) and the Sudan Police Force (8), often occurring in the context of military operations in the Jebel Marra area. Remaining casualties were attributed to unidentified armed elements (16), SLA/AW (9) and SLA/General Leadership (1). More than a third of incidents (62 children) were caused by unexploded ordnance.

164. The United Nations verified that 68 girls were subjected to sexual violence, a 55 per cent increase compared with 2017 (44). Cases were attributed to Government Security Forces (39), including RSF (20), SAF (17), the Sudan Police Force (1), the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) (1), followed by unidentified armed elements (29). The majority of cases occurred in the context of clashes in the Jebel Marra area.

165. A total of 17 attacks on schools (14) and hospitals (3) were verified and attributed to Government Security Forces (12), including RSF (7) and SAF (5), followed by unidentified armed elements (5). In addition, the United Nations verified the military use of one school by SAF in West Darfur, which was vacated during the

year. A school used for military purposes by SAF in Laiba, East Jebel Marra, reported on previously, remained occupied at the time of writing.

166. A total of 22 children (17 boys, 5 girls) were verified as having been abducted by the Government Security Forces (14), including RSF (9), SAF (2), the Border Guards (2) and the Popular Police Force (1), and most of those abductions were followed by arrests. Unidentified armed elements were responsible for the abduction of eight children.

167. While no incident of denial of humanitarian access was verified, the prevailing security situation and access restrictions imposed by parties to conflict largely complicated humanitarian access to children.

Grave violations: Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei

168. During the reporting period, access restrictions hindered monitoring and reporting by the United Nations on grave violations committed against children.

169. The killing of a boy by unexploded ordnance was verified in Southern Kordofan.

170. Three schools and one health clinic in Blue Nile, which had been used for military purposes since 2011, were vacated by the Government in June 2018.

Developments and concerns

171. Major political developments in April 2019 resulted in the removal of the President of the Sudan and his Government. I welcome efforts made to sustain the gains of the action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use, which was completed in 2018, including by preserving institutional structures at the national and state levels and taking steps to develop, with the United Nations, a national plan for the prevention of violations against children. I am encouraged by the continued collaboration between the Government and the United Nations in the training of security forces, local authorities, community members and community-based child protection networks on child protection and child rights, in particular at the state level, and I encourage these areas of collaboration to be further reinforced in all parts of Darfur. I also welcome the vacating by military authorities of schools and health facilities and encourage the authorities to continue to demilitarize schools, in line with the Safe Schools Declaration. I further encourage the authorities to operationalize the complaint mechanism manual for reporting child recruitment, to disseminate the standard operating procedures on the release and handover of children associated with armed groups among all Government security forces and to roll out the national awareness-raising campaign for preventing violations against children.

172. I am, however, concerned about the elevated numbers of cases of killing and maiming, sexual violence and abductions perpetrated against children in the context of clashes in the Jebel Marra area. I remind all parties to abide by their obligations under international law to protect children, including by respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, and by ensuring the accountability of all perpetrators. I am further concerned about the lack of access for the United Nations to areas under SPLM/N control and call on the group to allow and facilitate safe and unimpeded access to verify the implementation of its 2016 action plan on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children.

Syrian Arab Republic

173. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continued throughout 2018, with an increasing number of grave violations (3,021), the highest number of violations ever verified in the country, despite security and access restrictions. In addition, 934 violations that took place in 2017 and in previous years were also verified. In January,

the Government of Turkey officially launched Operation "Olive Branch" in support of groups self-affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in northern Syrian Arab Republic. Following a five-year-long besiegement, pro-Government forces regained control over the previously besieged enclave of eastern Ghutah. April witnessed the launch of the Government's military operations against armed groups in southern Damascus. In July, fighting between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), supported by the international counter-ISIL coalition, and ISIL in Hajin and Dashishah, Dayr al-Zawr, intensified, with air strikes and ground operations.

Grave violations

174. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 806 children (670 boys, 136 girls), 22 per cent of whom were under 15 years of age (179), and 94 per cent of whom were used in combat roles (754). The majority of the children were recruited and used by YPG/YPJ (313) operating under the umbrella of SDF, followed by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (Levant Liberation Organization) (187), groups self-affiliated with the FSA (170), Ahrar al-Sham (34), ISIL (30), Army of Islam (17), Nur al-Din al-Zanki (16), Syrian Government forces (10), and unidentified armed elements (29). More than 40 per cent of the children recruited by the YPG/YPJ (126) were girls, 20 of whom were below the age of 15 and 119 of whom served in combat roles. The majority of cases were verified in Idlib, Aleppo and Raqqah. At least 25 child casualties resulted from combat and there were cases of children switching association after new groups gained control of territory.

175. The United Nations verified the deprivation of liberty of 51 children (50 boys, 1 girl) for their alleged association with parties to conflict, the majority by YPG/YPJ (40), followed by groups self-affiliated with FSA (8), Syrian Government forces (2) and Ahrar al-Sham (1). Some were subject to ill-treatment, torture or rape. In addition, at least 1,248 children, mainly under the age of 5 and of multiple nationalities, were deprived of their liberty in sites for internally displaced persons across the north-east of the country. The camps were managed by local authorities and YPG/YPJ.

176. The United Nations verified the killing (1,106) and maiming (748) of 1,854 children by Syrian Government and pro-government air forces (888), Syrian Government forces (148), pro-Government forces (96), ISIL (70), groups self-affiliated with FSA and Operation "Olive Branch" (54), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (25), YPG/YPJ (10), Army of Islam (7), the international counter-ISIL coalition (4), Ahrar al-Sham (2) and by unidentified armed elements (550). The majority of child casualties occurred in Idlib, Rif Dimashq and Aleppo and more than half of the casualties resulted from air strikes (987), including the use of barrel bombs and cluster munitions, followed by unexploded ordnance (434) and shelling (118). For instance, in January, Syrian Government forces dropped a barrel bomb on a residential area in Armanaz town, Idlib, resulting in the killing of 15 children.

177. The United Nations verified 38 incidents of sexual violence perpetrated against children by ISIL (30), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (5), FSA-affiliated Faylaq al-Sham (2) and Syrian Government forces (1), 30 of which occurred in previous years. Incidents included forced marriage, rape, trafficking and sexual violence while children were deprived of liberty. Sexual violence remained underreported owing to access restrictions, the lack of access to services for victims and stigma.

178. The United Nations verified 113 attacks on schools, a 69 per cent increase compared with 2017, and 112 attacks on hospitals, the highest number recorded since the beginning of the conflict. Attacks on schools were attributed to government and pro-government air forces (60), Syrian Government forces (24), pro-government forces and militia (12), ISIL (2), YPG/YPJ (2), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (1) and unidentified elements (12). Attacks on hospitals were attributed to

government and pro-government air forces (82), Syrian Government forces (5), pro-government forces and militia (6), ISIL (1), the international counter-ISIL coalition (1) and unidentified armed elements (17). Child casualties resulted from attacks on schools (96) and hospitals (55). Close to 70 per cent of the attacks on schools and hospitals were caused by air strikes, including the use of barrel bombs, followed by shelling and the use of improvised explosive devices. Education and medical personnel were killed and maimed (48) and education personnel were detained (9).

179. The United Nations verified the military use of 24 schools and three hospitals, used as ammunition storage, military bases and as detention facilities. Schools were used by YPG/YPJ (14), groups self-affiliated with FSA and Operation "Olive Branch" (7), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (2) and ISIL (1). Hospitals were occupied by ISIL (1), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (1) and unidentified armed elements (1). Two health facilities and three schools were attacked following the military use thereof.

180. The United Nations verified the abduction of 69 children (40 boys, 24 girls, 5 sex unknown), some as young as two years old, by ISIL (44), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (8), FSA-affiliated Rahman Corps (4), YPG/YPJ (3), Army of Islam (2), Ahrar al-Sham (1) and unidentified armed elements (7). Children were primarily abducted because of the alleged affiliation of relatives with parties to the conflict (32), for recruitment (25) and forced marriage (12). One in five children abducted was subjected to ill-treatment, torture, rape or execution.

181. The United Nations verified 59 incidents of denial of humanitarian access involving attacks and threats of attack on humanitarian facilities (37), humanitarian transport and personnel, and the removal or blocking of humanitarian supplies (22). The attacks resulted in the killing and maiming of humanitarian workers (18), and deprivation of liberty (23). Main perpetrators included the Government and pro-government air forces (13), Syrian Government forces (8), pro-government forces (3) and pro-government militia (1), YPG/YPJ (9), ISIL (2), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (2), groups self-affiliated with FSA (2), and unidentified armed elements (19). Several children in Rukban have died from preventable conditions as a result of the lack of access to adequate health care.

Developments and concerns

182. I note the United Nations dialogue with the Government on child protection, including on the reintegration of children. I encourage the Government to put in place long-term preventive measures on the protection of children, including by prioritizing the implementation of the national workplan on ending and preventing child recruitment by the national committee. I note a significant reduction in the recruitment and use of children in 2018. I further call for the adoption of an action plan on ending and preventing the grave violations for which it is listed.

183. I welcome the engagement of SDF, including YPG/YPJ, with my Special Representative, leading to the development and adoption of an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in 2019. I urge SDF to expedite its implementation, notably the screening of all children within their ranks, including their swift handover to civilian authorities, the implementation of awareness-raising activities and the establishment of a public complaint procedure to report the recruitment and use of children.

184. I note the engagement by groups self-affiliated with FSA, and by Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam, as regards training, as well as the commitments made regarding child protection. I am encouraged by the issuance of a military order by Army of Islam setting 18 as the minimum age of recruitment and call for its swift implementation.

The cases that occurred in the context of Operation Olive Branch are currently under investigation.

185. I am seriously concerned about the increasing number of grave violations verified by the United Nations in the Syrian Arab Republic, in particular, the elevated numbers of child casualties and attacks against schools and hospitals. I remain deeply concerned about the detention of children on security-related charges.

186. I call upon all countries concerned to facilitate the repatriation of foreign women and children actually and allegedly affiliated with ISIL, in line with the guiding principle of non-refoulement and with respect for the best interests of the child.

Yemen

187. The conflict in Yemen entered its fifth year, with further deterioration in the dire humanitarian situation. Throughout the year, the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen continued air strikes, the Houthis continued to fire missiles into Saudi Arabia, and ground fighting intensified throughout the country. Air strikes attributed to the Coalition affected the majority of governorates, in particular Hudaydah, Sa'dah and Hajjah. In June, Government forces, backed by the Coalition, launched an offensive against the Houthis in Hudaydah Governorate. In December, the intra-Yemeni consultations convened by my Special Envoy for Yemen resulted in the Stockholm Agreement, followed by the establishment by the Security Council of a monitoring mission, the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, to support its implementation. The capacity of the United Nations to monitor and verify grave violations was significantly impeded by threats and by monitors being deprived of their liberty by parties to conflict. A detailed account of the impact of armed conflict on children in Yemen is available in my country report (S/2019/453).

Grave violations

188. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 370 children, attributed to Houthis (170), Yemeni Government forces (111), Security Belt Forces (44), Shabwani Elite Forces (23), Popular Resistance (17), Hadrami Elite Forces (4) and forces loyal to the Southern Transitional Council (1). The decrease compared with 2017 (842) is mainly a result of access and security restrictions, the fear experienced by communities, should they report, owing to the risk of repercussions, and cases of the deprivation of liberty of monitors. Of the total number, 37 per cent of the children (138) were used in active combat, at least 50 per cent of whom (70) were below the age of 15. Large-scale child recruitment reportedly took place in schools, orphanages and communities.

189. For the first time, the United Nations verified the recruitment of 16 girls between the ages of 15 and 17 by the Houthis in Sa'dah. The girls were used to encourage male members of their families to join the Houthis and to mobilize other women and girls to do the same. Some were also trained in the use of weapons. Boys were recruited and used as combatants and in various support roles, including as porters, guards, for patrolling and to assist in intelligence gathering.

190. The United Nations verified the deprivation of liberty of 96 boys by parties to conflict for alleged association with opposing parties, marking a substantial increase compared with 2017 (23). The majority of the children were held by the Houthis for their alleged association with the Yemeni Government Forces and were subsequently released (53). The Coalition captured 42 boys and Yemeni Government Forces held them in Ma'rib Governorate for their alleged association with the Houthis, 27 of those boys were released in February and reportedly reunified with their families. At the time of writing, the remaining 15 children were still held in Ma'rib. Lastly, one boy was held by the Popular Resistance for his alleged association with the Houthis.

191. The United Nations verified 1,689 child casualties, including the killing of 576 children (430 boys, 143 girls, 3 unknown sex) and maiming of 1,113 children (815 boys, 298 girls). The majority of child casualties resulted from ground fighting (755), followed by air strikes (685) and unexploded ordnance (223). A total of 43 per cent of child casualties were attributed to the Coalition (729) of which 684 were due to air strikes and 45 to ground fighting, followed by the Houthis (398), the Yemeni Government Forces (58) and the Popular Resistance (48), among other parties. Child casualties attributed to the Coalition remained high throughout the year, with a decrease during the last quarter of 2018. Of the total child casualties, 30 per cent occurred during offensives in Hudaydah (507), 267 of which were due to ground fighting and 181 to air strikes. The second highest number of child casualties was verified in Sa'dah Governorate (354), followed by Ta'izz Governorate (341).

192. The United Nations verified the perpetration of sexual violence against nine children (7 boys, 2 girls) between the ages of 9 and 17, attributed to the Yemeni armed forces (6), the Popular Resistance (2) and the Houthis (1).

193. The United Nations verified 44 attacks against schools (28) and hospitals (16), an increase compared with 2017, 84 per cent of which caused the partial or complete destruction of the facilities. Attacks on schools were attributed to the Coalition (12), the Houthis (12) and unidentified parties (4). Attacks on hospitals were attributed to the Popular Resistance (5), the Coalition (3), the Houthis (3), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (2) and unidentified armed elements (3). One third of the attacks occurred in Ta'izz (14), followed by Sa'dah (10) and Hudaydah (7).

194. The United Nations verified 32 military uses of schools, a fourfold increase compared with 2017, attributed to the Houthis (28), Yemeni Government Forces (3) and Security Belt Forces (1). At least 20 schools were used by the Houthis to mobilize and train children and 4 were used for recruiting and mobilizing girls. Three military use of hospitals were attributed to the Houthis (2) and the Popular Resistance (1). The majority of cases took place in Sa'dah, Mahwit and Hudaydah.

195. The United Nations verified 275 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, including restrictions of movement (177), interference in the implementation of humanitarian assistance (49), violence against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities (44) and attacks on humanitarian water facilities (5). The incidents were mainly attributed to the Houthis (206), the Coalition (41) and the Yemeni Government Forces (7), among other parties, and were concentrated in Hudaydah, Sana'a and Sa'dah. Access to areas along the frontlines was particularly difficult, with limited presence of humanitarian actors in the most affected districts and with the Houthis often requesting humanitarian organizations to share beneficiary lists and project details as a precondition to implementing humanitarian activities in areas under their control.

Developments and concerns

196. I welcome the endorsement of a road map by the Government in December 2018 to expedite the implementation of the action plan to end and prevent recruitment and use of children of 2014 and call for the immediate release of all children from its ranks, as well as for the provision of unimpeded access to civilian child protection actors to children deprived of liberty for their alleged association with armed groups. I count on the Government to follow through with commitments made.

197. I am encouraged by engagements with the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, including the signing of a memorandum of understanding in March 2019 to enhance the protection of children, which provides a framework for the development of a workplan with my Special Representative. I look forward to the implementation of the memorandum of understanding and further steps to strengthen child protection.

198. I condemn the increasing number of child casualties, which are often a result of attacks in densely populated areas and against civilian objects, including schools and hospitals. The rise in the number of child casualties attributed to the Government Forces and the Coalition and the persistent killing and maiming of children by the Popular Resistance are increasingly worrying. I renew my call for all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to ensure that military operations are conducted in line with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

199. I strongly condemn violations against children committed by armed groups and I am particularly concerned about the persistently high levels of the recruitment and use, and killing and maiming of children and of denial of humanitarian access and by the increase in the attacks on schools and hospitals committed by the Houthis. I call on the Houthis to meaningfully engage with the United Nations to conclude an action plan.

200. I also call upon all parties to the conflict to enhance engagement with the United Nations to develop standard operating procedures on the release and reintegration of children associated with parties.

B. Situations not on the agenda of the Security Council or other situations

India

201. Children continued to be affected by incidents of violence between armed groups and the Government, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir and in the context of the Naxalite insurgency.

Grave violations

202. The United Nations received reports of child recruitment and use in Jammu and Kashmir. Five children, some as young as 14, were reportedly recruited by militant groups, including by Hizbul Mujahideen (two) and Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (one). The two other children joined Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and were reportedly killed in an encounter with the government forces on 9 December. In addition, reports of the systematic recruitment of children by Naxalites continued to be received.

203. Children continued to be reportedly killed and injured in operations by the government security forces against Naxalites in the States of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Odisha. For example, on 22 April, eight children were reportedly killed during an attack on Naxalites in the district of Garhchiroli, Maharashtra, where the C-60 district-level special forces claimed to have killed at least 40 Naxalites. In Jammu and Kashmir, 31 children between the ages of 7 and 17 were allegedly killed, including during Government armed forces operations. At least 150 children, some as young as 1, were reportedly injured, mostly by pellet bullets used by the security forces.

204. Allegations of the perpetration of sexual violence against girls by the security forces in Kashmir were reported. For instance, an 8-year-old girl was reportedly abducted, drugged, raped for three days and murdered in Kathua district by special police officers.

Developments and concerns

205. I welcome the Government's measures to provide protection to children, notably through the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, but remain concerned by the reported child casualties and the recruitment and use of children in

some areas of the country. I encourage the Government to put in place prevention and accountability measures to hold perpetrators of grave violations to account in view of ending and preventing grave violations against children.

Nigeria

206. The Boko Haram crisis was marked by attacks across the Lake Chad Basin and by increased attacks on hospitals in north-east Nigeria. The abduction of children, in particular girls, often for the purpose of sexual abuse, forced marriage or used to bear improvised explosive devices continued at elevated levels. In 2018, the United Nations faced significant access restrictions to conflict-affected areas, impeding its ability to verify grave violations and to deliver life-saving aid to children.

Grave violations

207. A total of 1,947 children (1,596 boys, 351 girls) were verified as having been recruited and used in Nigeria, 1,646 by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and 301 by Boko Haram. No new recruitment and use by CJTF was verified in 2018 and all cases verified occurred in previous years. 833 children (694 boys, 139 girls) were formally separated from the group during 2018 as a result of the action plan. Boko Haram continued to recruit children and used 48 (38 girls) for the purpose of bearing and detonating improvised explosive devices in north-east Nigeria, 30 in Cameroon, 24 in Chad and 10 in the Niger.

208. In 2018, 418 children were deprived of liberty in Nigeria for their or their parents' alleged association with Boko Haram (304 boys, 86 girls, 28 unknown sex). The majority (52 per cent) of the children had been in detention for over two years. In 2018, the Nigerian authorities released 241 children from detention. In addition, 125 children were held in detention for alleged association with Boko Haram in the Niger, Cameroon (57) and Chad (18).

209. The United Nations verified 432 children killed (175) and maimed (257), attributed to Boko Haram (405), Nigerian Security Forces (NSF) (16), CJTF (1) and unattributed incidents of unexploded ordnance (10). Of the total child casualties attributed to Boko Haram, 58 per cent (234) were due to explosions of improvised explosive devices borne by civilians, including 48 children directly used as carriers of improvised explosive devices. Cases attributed to NSF occurred during the course of their response to Boko Haram offensives.

210. A total of 43 girls were subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence by Boko Haram (40) and NSF (3). Cases attributed to Boko Haram involved subjecting girls to sexual abuse and forced marriage while in captivity.

211. Attacks on schools (5) and hospitals (10) were verified in north-east Nigeria and attributed to Boko Haram (14) and NSF (1). Furthermore, one hospital in the Far North Region of Cameroon and two schools in the Diffa region of the Niger were attacked by Boko Haram. In addition, NSF used four schools in north-east Nigeria for military purposes.

212. Boko Haram abducted 180 children (45 boys, 135 girls), often for the purpose of recruitment, sexual abuse, forced marriage or for use as carriers of improvised explosive devices. In February 2018, Boko Haram abducted 111 children (110 girls) from a girls' school in Dapchi, Yobe State. Five of the girls died during the abduction, 104 girls were eventually released, and one girl remains in captivity. More than 100 of the Chibok girls abducted in 2014 remain in captivity or missing. In addition, Boko Haram abducted 28 children in Cameroon, 23 in the Niger and 9 in Chad.

213. The number of denials of humanitarian access increased, from 5 in 2017 to 33 in 2018, in an environment where humanitarians face restrictions on movement

imposed by parties to conflict. Most cases were attributed to NSF (23) and Boko Haram (10) and took place in areas where the humanitarian needs of children were dire.

Developments and concerns

214. The United Nations continued engagement with CJTF within the framework of the action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use, signed in September 2017, and 833 children were formally separated from CJTF in 2018. I welcome this development and call on CJTF to continue the implementation of the plan with the United Nations. I take note of the constructive role played by the Government in support of this process and of the reintegration of released children.

215. While the release by the Nigerian authorities of 241 children from detention is encouraging, I remain concerned about children remaining in detention owing to their alleged association with Boko Haram. I call on the authorities to release all children, ensure their sustainable reintegration, swiftly adopt a handover protocol for children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors, in line with international standards, and provide access to the United Nations to all children deprived of liberty. I also urge the Government to avoid impinging on students' safety and education, in line with its commitments in the Safe Schools Declaration, and to swiftly endorse the Paris Principles.

216. The scale and brutality of grave violations perpetrated by Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria and the subregion remain a serious concern, notably the continued use of children, in particular girls, as carriers of improvised explosive devices and the targeting of girls' education, including through abductions and attacks on schools. I call upon the group to immediately cease all violations and abide by its obligations under international law.

Pakistan

217. Elections to the Senate and general elections, tensions between neighbouring countries and the emergence of new groups and continued threats from militant groups affected the security situation, including children's rights and protection. Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Newly Merged Districts remained the main geographical areas of concern.

Grave violations

218. The United Nations received reports of 36 incidents which resulted in the killing (7) and maiming (56) of 63 children. Of those incidents, 20 were attributed to armed groups, including attacks claimed by Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan in Balochistan (2) and Killa Abdullah (1) and the Islamic State in Quetta (1). Ten of the reported incidents involved the use of improvised explosive devices disguised as toys and resulted in the maiming of 19 children, mainly in Bannu, North Waziristan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Newly Merged Districts. The remaining 16 incidents involved cross-border attacks between Pakistan and India and reportedly killed (4) and maimed (18) 22 children.

219. A total of 34 attacks on schools, injuring 26 students, were reported. Among those, 14 attacks, which targeted girls' education, occurred during a single day in August in Chilas in Gilgit-Baltistan. Some attacks involved explosions and the use of improvised explosive devices and grenades. In addition, personnel of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative reported over 300 attacks in 2018.

220. During the General Election, on 25 July, 8 schools were reportedly used as polling stations and half of them were attacked with grenades. For example,

unidentified elements allegedly threw a hand grenade at a girls' primary school in Kushak Village, before polling started.

Developments and concerns

221. I am seriously concerned by the reported spike in the number of child casualties and attacks on schools, including the targeting of girls' education, as well as attacks relating to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. I welcome the Government's efforts to protect workers conducting the polio campaign and call on the Government to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and take preventive measures to protect schools.

Philippines

222. Although the Marawi siege ended in October 2017, military operations continued throughout 2018 against remaining members of the Maute Group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and other Islamic State-affiliated groups. Additionally, conflict-related incidents between the New People's Army (NPA) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, who were supported by pro-government paramilitary groups, intensified after the President, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, declared the Communist Party of the Philippines-NPA a terrorist organization, in December 2017, and after the cessation of formal peace talks in June 2018. Those operations resulted in the displacement of over 212,000 people, half of whom were children, the prolongation of martial law until December 2019 and access restrictions for the monitoring and verification of grave violations.

Grave violations

223. The United Nations verified 69 grave violations against children, 26 of which took place in 2017 but could only be verified in 2018, mainly owing to restricted access to Marawi after the siege.

224. The recruitment and use of 19 children (10 boys, 9 girls) by armed groups (18) and armed forces (1) were verified. The Maute Group used 13 children as human shields, to extract gunpowder from firecrackers or to ransack houses during the Marawi siege in 2017. NPA used five children in combat or support roles, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines used one boy to provide support in a military camp. The United Nations received additional allegations of the recruitment and use of children by NPA (eight), Maute Group (four) and ASG (one).

225. The United Nations verified the detention of four children (including one girl), between the ages of 16 and 17, by security forces for their alleged association with armed groups, for periods ranging from two days to one month.

226. The United Nations verified the killing (16) and maiming (41) of 57 children (33 boys, 24 girls). Child casualties were attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (8), NPA (3), Maute Group and ASG (1 each). Responsibility in 10 cases was attributed to armed groups allegedly influenced by Islamic State, and in 34 cases, responsibility could not be attributed. Half of the total casualties were caused by explosive remnants of war (17) and improvised explosive devices (12). For instance, on 2 September, in Isulan city, Sultan Kudarat, the explosion of an improvised explosive device resulted in the killing of a girl and the maiming of four boys, some as young as 5.

227. Three cases of the rape of girls, some as young as 14, perpetrated by the Maute Group, were verified. The girls had been raped or forced to marry Maute Group members during the Marawi siege in 2017.

228. The United Nations verified attacks, including threats of attacks, on schools and protected personnel, which affected two schools and 23 teachers, who were threatened mainly because they were suspected to be supportive of NPA. Those violations were attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (18), the Maute Group (5) and unidentified armed elements (2). In addition, two schools were used for up to a week by the Armed Forces of the Philippines as bases during military operations.

229. The United Nations verified the abduction of 13 children (6 boys, 7 girls) by the Maute Group (10), during the Marawi siege, and by ASG (3). For instance, a 16-year-old girl was abducted by the Maute Group, was raped twice and was assigned to extract gunpowder from firecrackers and to take care of Maute Group members' children. On 16 October 2017, she managed to escape, together with other hostages, but was injured by a bullet.

Developments and concerns

230. I welcome the establishment of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority and reaffirm the readiness of the United Nations to help build its capacity to achieve peace, democratic governance and respect for human and children's rights. I commend the Government for the enactment of the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Bill into national law on 10 January 2019, for the signing of the implementing rules and regulations of this law, and for its continuous commitment to the finalization of the national policy framework on schools as zones of peace. I trust that it will strengthen the protection of children and prevent further threats or attacks on indigenous communities' schools from the Armed Forces of the Philippines and pro-government paramilitary groups, and I call on the Government to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

231. I am encouraged by the decrease in the number of grave violations but remain deeply concerned regarding the increased number of child casualties caused by explosive remnants of war, and by the lack of access for humanitarian actors to monitor, verify and provide appropriate response to the victims of the Marawi siege. I am concerned about the lack of due process for children arrested and detained by security forces for their alleged association with armed groups and would like to remind the Government that children demobilized from armed groups, against whom charges have been brought, are protected under the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act.

Thailand

232. 2018 saw a continued decline in the number of violent incidents in the southern border provinces of Thailand. Talks between the Government and the umbrella MARA Patani continued at a slow pace. The Government proposed to pilot, with the collaboration of non-State armed groups, a "safety zone" in one district that would have aimed to reduce attacks on civilians. The concept never truly advanced, in part owing to a reported lack of full commitment by the Barisan Revolusi Nasional, the main non-State armed group operating in the border provinces.

Grave violations

233. Children continued to be victims of shootings and of the use of improvised explosive devices. Reportedly, one child was killed and at least five children were maimed during the year. For instance, on 6 February, 50m from Baan Siyoh School in Yala's Yaha district, an attack using improvised explosive devices, allegedly targeting security forces who were part of a teacher protection unit, injured two 12-year-old girls.

234. One attack against a school was documented, although additional attacks were launched near schools, including attacks on security forces who were guarding teachers.

Developments and concerns

235. A technical mission was conducted in January 2019 by the office of my Special Representative and UNICEF, with the aim of further strengthening Government and civil society efforts to better protect children and schools from attack in the southern border provinces. Findings included the need to highlight good practices and potential gaps in the Government's efforts to protect schools and the need for further specialized training of the security forces. The strengthening of child protection capacity in the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre is a key positive development in this regard and I call on the Government to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and take preventive measures to protect schools. Thailand endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and is welcomed as a centre of excellence in this regard.

IV. Recommendations

236. I am deeply concerned by the scale and severity of the grave violations committed against children in 2018, notably the record high number of casualties as a result of killing and maiming and the increase in the number of violations attributed to international forces. I call upon all parties to immediately end and take all necessary measures to prevent such grave violations, including through ensuring mitigation measures and enhancing training on preventing the six grave violations, as well as by ensuring strong accountability measures for the perpetrators of crimes against children.

237. I urge Member States, including when acting as part of international forces, to ensure that their responses to all threats to peace and security are conducted in full compliance with international law, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and military necessity. I request my Special Representative to engage proactively with all parties referred to in the present report to end and prevent further grave violations against children.

238. The detention of children remained an issue of concern and I reiterate that this measure should only be used as a last resort, for the shortest period of time, and that alternatives to detention should be prioritized whenever possible. Moreover, I urge Member States to treat children allegedly associated with armed forces or groups, including groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, primarily as victims.

239. In line with Security Council resolution 2417 (2018), I call upon Member States to allow safe, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and the protection of humanitarian personnel and assets. Parties to conflict should disseminate clear orders specifying that humanitarian assistance for children be facilitated.

240. I reiterate my call upon Member States to continue supporting the implementation of action plans and other commitments aimed at strengthening the protection of children in armed conflict, including by facilitating the engagement of the United Nations with armed groups.

241. I encourage Member States, regional and subregional organizations to strengthen dedicated child protection capacities and to engage with the United Nations to development prevention initiatives in order to forestall grave violations.

242. I reiterate my call upon the Security Council to ensure that provisions for the protection of children are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peace operations and to request adequate child protection capacity so as to mainstream child protection, conduct dialogue on action plans, release and reintegrate children and further strengthen monitoring and reporting.

243. I enjoin the donor community to engage in a discussion to better address the funding gaps for the reintegration of children, thereby allowing child protection actors to react swiftly to the release of children and put in place long-term viable alternatives to military life, notably by placing a specific focus on girls, in particular on psychosocial support and on education programmes and vocational training for girls.

244. I call on Member States to engage closely with the United Nations to facilitate the return or relocation of foreign children and women actually or allegedly affiliated with groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, and to ensure a coordinated response on the basis of international law and children's rights, bearing in mind their best interests.

245. I welcome national and international efforts to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes against children in situations of armed conflict and encourage Member States to play a further proactive role in ensuring an international response where national accountability efforts are unsuccessful, so that impunity can end and cycles of violence can be broken.

246. I welcome all steps taken to ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, and call on Member States to further strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, including through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the endorsement and implementation of the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

V. Lists contained in the annexes to the present report

247. No new listings were added for 2018, but a number of previously listed parties to conflict have had additional violations added, on the basis of incidents verified in 2018. In Afghanistan, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) continued to commit attacks against schools and hospitals and has therefore been listed for this violation. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nyatura has been listed as a result of the group continuing to perpetrate incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence. In South Sudan, the pro-Machar Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition (pro-Machar SPLA-IO) has been listed for abduction.

248. There will be no delisting for 2018, except for two technical delistings. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mai-Mai Kata Katanga has been removed, as the group ceased to exist when its leader surrendered in October 2016. In South Sudan, the White Army has been removed, as the group no longer showed evidence of clear leadership or structure and ceased to exist.

249. Other modifications to the list have resulted from changes in the landscape of armed conflict in the respective situations or changes in measures taken by parties to protect children. In this regard, in the Central African Republic, the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC), as part of the former Séléka coalition, signed an action plan and will be listed in section B of annex I with respect to measures put in place. Similarly, in South Sudan, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) will be listed in section B of annex I, with regard to recruitment and use only. Lastly, in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Kurdish People's Protection Units

(YPG/YPJ) will be listed in section B of annex I as a result of their enhanced engagement, which led to the signature of an action plan in 2019. On the other hand, in the Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM/N) will fall back to section A of annex I owing to the lack of action in support of the action plan during 2018.

250. Modifications to terminology and to names of parties resulted from some political changes on the ground. In South Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) is now listed as South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF). In addition, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition – pro Taban Deng is now listed as Taban Deng-allied SSPDF. They are now included as part of SSPDF and therefore listed as State actors. In Yemen, the Houthis/Ansar Allah will be listed as Houthis, and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula/Ansar al-Sharia will be listed as Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. The coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen also changed to be listed as the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen. Lastly, in the Syrian Arab Republic, the People's Protection Units will be listed as Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ) to reflect changes on the ground.

251. In view of the preventive and protective measures taken by the Government to better protect children over the past number of years, Thailand will be removed from the report in 2020.

Annex I

Pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1379 (2001), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015), parties that commit grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council*

A. Listed parties that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children

Parties in Afghanistan

Non-State actors

1. Haqqani Network[a,b]
2. Hizb-i Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar[a,b]
3. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province[a,b,d]
4. Taliban forces and affiliated groups[a,b,d,e]

Parties in Colombia

Non-State actors

Ejército de Liberación Nacional[a]

Parties in the Central African Republic

Non-State actors

1. Former Séléka coalition and associated armed groups, including the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique and Union pour la paix en Centrafrique[a,b,c,d]
2. Local defence militias known as the anti-balaka[a,b,c]
3. Lord's Resistance Army[a,b,c,e]

Parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Non-State actors

1. Allied Democratic Forces[a,b,d,e]
2. Bana Mura militias[c,e]
3. Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi[a,c,d,e]
4. Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri[a,c,d,e]

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* Parties listed in section A have not put in place adequate measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period; parties listed in section B have put in place measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period.

[a] Party that recruits and uses children.

[b] Party that kills and maims children.

[c] Party that commits rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

[d] Party that engages in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.

[e] Party that abducts children.

[f] Party that has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).

5. Kamuina Nsapu[a,d,e]
6. Lord's Resistance Army[a,b,c,e]
7. Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain[a]
8. Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix (also known as Mai-Mai Lafontaine)[a]
9. Mai-Mai Mazembe[a,b,e]
10. Mai-Mai Simba[a,c]
11. Nduma défense du Congo[a,b]
12. Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové[a,b]
13. Nyatura[a,c,e]
14. Raia Mutomboki[a,c,e]

Parties in Iraq

Non-State actors

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant[a,b,c,d,e]

Parties in Mali

Non-State actors

1. Ansar Eddine[a,c]
2. Mouvement pour l'unification et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest[a,c]
3. Platform, including affiliated groups[a]

Parties in Myanmar

State actors

Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated Border Guard forces[b,c]

Non-State actors

1. Karen National Liberation Army[a]
2. United Wa State Army[a]

Parties in Somalia

Non-State actors

1. Al-Shabaab[a,b,c,d,e]
2. Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ)[a]

Parties in South Sudan

State actors

South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF), including Taban Deng-allied SSPDF[b,c,d,e]

Non-State actors

Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition – pro-Machar[a,b,e,f]

Parties in the Sudan

Non-State actors

1. Justice and Equality Movement[a,f]
2. Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid[a]
3. Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi[a,f]
4. Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North[a,f]

Parties in the Syrian Arab Republic

State actors

Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and pro-government militias[a,b,c,d]

Non-State actors

1. Ahrar al-Sham[a,b]
2. Groups self-affiliated with the Free Syrian Army[a]
3. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant[a,b,c,d,e]
4. Army of Islam[a]
5. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led by Nusrah Front (Levant Liberation Organization)[a,b]

Parties in Yemen

Non-State actors

1. Houthis[a,b,d]
2. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula[a]
3. Pro-government militias, including the Salafists and popular committees[a]
4. Security Belt Forces[a]

B. Listed parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children

Parties in Afghanistan

State actors

Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police[a,f]

Parties in the Central African Republic

Non-State actors

Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique as part of the former Séléka coalition[a,b,c,d]

Parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

State actors

Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo[c,f]

Iraq

State actors

Popular mobilization forces[a]

Parties in Mali

Non-State actors

Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad[a,c,f]

Parties in Myanmar

State actors

Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated Border Guard forces[a,f]

Non-State actors

1. Democratic Karen Benevolent Army[a]
2. Kachin Independence Army[a]
3. Karenni Army[a]
4. Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council[a]
5. Shan State Army[a]

Parties in Somalia

State actors

Somali National Army[a,b,f]

Parties in South Sudan

State actors

South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF), including Taban Deng-allied SSPDF[a,f]

Parties in the Syrian Arab Republic

Non-State actors

Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ)[a]

Parties in Yemen

State actors

1. Government forces, including the Yemeni armed forces[a,f]
2. Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen[b]

Annex II

Pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1379 (2001), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015), parties that commit grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict not on the agenda of the Security Council, or in other situations*

A. Listed parties that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children

Parties in Nigeria

Non-State actors

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, also known as Boko Haram[a,b,c,d,e]

Parties in the Philippines

Non-State actors

1. Abu Sayyaf Group[a]
2. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters[a]
3. New People's Army[a]

B. Listed parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children

Parties in Nigeria

Non-State actors

Civilian Joint Task Force[a,f]

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* Parties listed in section A have not put in place adequate measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period; parties listed in section B have put in place measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period.

[a] Party that recruits and uses children.

[b] Party that kills and maims children.

[c] Party that commits rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

[d] Party that engages in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.

[e] Party that abducts children.

[f] Party that has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).