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Input for the Universal Periodic Review of Somalia

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

September 2025

Background

Between 2022 and December 2024, the situation of children affected by the armed conflict in Somalia remained devastating, with the number of grave violations among the highest across all situations on the children and armed conflict agenda.

A complex humanitarian situation persisted in Somalia, exacerbated by climate shocks, with the worst drought witnessed in four decades that lasted between 2020 and 2023, and that ended with heavier than usual seasonal rains causing widespread flooding affecting over 468,000 people (March to May 2023). Subsequent historic rains and flooding (October to December 2023) impacted more than 2.5 million people and resulted in food insecurity and disease outbreaks severely affecting children. By December 2024, because of conflict and insecurity, 6.9 million people needed humanitarian assistance, including 4.3 million children. About half a million people were internally displaced, over half of whom were children. In addition, owing to insecurity and displacement, an estimated 4.9 million children were out of school, increasing the risk of recruitment and use and other grave violations.

Overall, from 2022 to 2024, the United Nations verified a total of 7,634 grave violations¹ (2,568 in 2024, 2,283 in 2023 and 2,783 in 2022). 6,076 children (4,606 boys and 1,470 girls; 1,992 children in 2024, 1,802 in 2023 and 2,282 in 2022) were affected by the four individual grave violations (recruitment and use, abductions, sexual violence and killing and maiming, with hundreds of children being a victim of two or more grave violations. Over this period, the recruitment and use of children was the most prevalent grave violation (2,520 children: 2,344 boys, 176 girls), (768 in 2024, 658 in 2023 and 1,094 in 2022), followed by abduction (2,300: 2,011 boys, 289 girls) (887 in 2024, 719 in 2023 and 694 in 2022) and killing and maiming of children (1,936: 1,436 boys, 500 girls) (595 in 2024, 629 in 2023 and 712 in 2022). Concerns also continued over sexual violence against children (685: 4 boys, 681 girls) (267 in 2024, 197 in 2023 and 221 in 2022), which remains underreported, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals (137) (39 in 2024, 54 in 2023, 44 in 2022), and the denial of humanitarian access (56)

¹ The six grave violations against children in armed conflict, as identified by the UN Security Council, are: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks against schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access to children.

(12 in 2024, 26 in 2023 and 18 in 2022).

Most of the grave violations against children were committed by armed groups. Al-Shabaab remained the main security threat and continued to perpetrate the majority of grave violations against children, followed by clan militia and government security forces, notably the Somali National Army, the Somali Police Force and the regional forces of Somali Federal Member States. In particular, 211 cases of killing and maiming of children, 74 cases of sexual violence against children and 63 cases of recruitment and use of children were attributed to government security forces between 2022 and 2024. Furthermore, during this period, 118 cases of killing and maiming of children, 115 cases of recruitment and use of children and 17 cases of sexual violence against children were attributed to the regional forces of Somali Federal Member States.

The detention of children by national authorities for their alleged association with armed groups remained an issue of great concern. Between 2022 and 2024, a total of 745 children (726 boys, 19 girls) were detained (291 in 2024, 278 in 2023 and 176 in 2022) for periods ranging from a couple of hours to several months. In Puntland, children continued to be detained for association with Al-Shabaab and faced military jurisdiction. On 17 August 2024, four young adults were executed in Galkayo, Puntland, following their convictions and death sentences for crimes they had committed when they were associated with Al-Shabaab under the age of 18. Earlier, the Puntland Age Verification Committee, including representatives from the Puntland authorities, concluded that they had been minors at the time the crimes were committed and recommended not to impose the death penalty.

In the annexes to the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/79/878-S/2025/247), Al-Shabaab is listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, and attacks on schools and hospitals. Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a is listed for recruitment and use of children. The Somali National Army and Somali Police Force are listed for killing and maiming and rape and other forms of sexual violence. In the same report, the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force have been delisted for the violation of recruitment and use of children. The delisting is conditional upon the continued implementation of their 2012 action plans on recruitment and use, and on killing and maiming, and the 2019 road map for the action plans implementation, and the continued decrease in such violations.

Engagement to end and prevent grave violations

In close collaboration with the United Nations, the Federal Government of Somalia made efforts to end, prevent and respond to grave violations against children and to advance the

2019 road map to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict and to accelerate the implementation of the two 2012 action plans on, respectively, killing and maiming and recruitment and use of children.

In 2022, to ensure accountability, the Minister of Defence set up an Inter-Ministerial Committee on children and armed conflict with the participation of the Director Generals of six-line Ministries, ensuring regular high-level engagement with the United Nations. The Somali security forces continued to closely work with the United Nations to conduct age screening exercises and on the implementation of the 2014 Standard Operating Procedure for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups.

In August 2022, the Cabinet endorsed a national policy on the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education. In July 2023, the Federal Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs validated the Age Verification Guidelines and Standardized Checklist to strengthen a formal and child-friendly procedure for age assessment in the absence of a comprehensive national birth registration system, effectively addressing disputes over age with the aim of ending the sentencing of children associated with Al-Shabaab to lengthy prison terms or death. The Federal Government has operationalized the guidelines by providing age verification trainings to key national authorities and Somali security forces.

Important progress was made to strengthen the legislative framework and policies to protect children in Somalia. On 2 December 2024, the Disability Rights Protection Law was signed prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities, including children in all areas of public and private life, addressing barriers towards the full enjoyment of their rights and inclusion in society. By December 2024, the constitutional review process was ongoing with the first four amended chapters to the 2012 Provisional Federal Constitution signed into law on 31 March 2024, maintaining the definition of a child as a person below 18 years. The Child Rights Bill remains under review at ministerial level, and the Juvenile Justice Bill continues to be under review at Parliament. Additionally, on 25 November 2024, the Cabinet approved the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child pending approval by Parliament. The Federal Government also continued to work on the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Recommendations to Somalia

- **End, prevent and respond to grave violations** against children and **comply with obligations** under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

- **Continue efforts to implement the two 2012 action plans** on killing and maiming and recruitment and use of children and the 2019 road map, including at the federal member state level.
- **Timely separate children from the ranks** of the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force for social and economic reintegration purposes.
- **Hold perpetrators accountable** in line with international human rights law and standards and **ensure access to justice and remedy** for survivors and victims of violations.
- **Immediately end child detention and treat children associated with armed forces and armed groups**, including those allegedly associated with Al-Shabaab, primarily **as victims** in line with international juvenile justice standards and the 2014 Standard Operating Procedure for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups. Any prosecution of children should respect internationally recognized standards of juvenile justice, including in relation to minimum age of criminal responsibility.
- **Finalize ongoing legislative processes**, ensuring that all legislation pertaining to children is consistent with the human rights commitments of Somalia, including the Juvenile Justice Bill and Child Rights Bill, regarding the age of majority amongst others.
- **Enact legislation prohibiting sexual violence** in line with the human rights commitments of Somalia and increase the availability of holistic services, reparations, and redress to survivors.
- **Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child** on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.