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Children and armed conflict in Nigeria

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which covers the period from January 2017 to December 2019, is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict. It is the second report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Nigeria and contains information on the impact of armed conflict on children during the period.

The report is focused on the three conflict-affected states in north-east Nigeria, namely Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. Highlighted herein are grave violations against children committed by parties to the conflict, including Boko Haram, the Civilian Joint Task Force and the Nigerian Security Forces. Grave violations in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and the Niger are also reflected in the context of the spillover of Boko Haram's activities beyond the borders of Nigeria.

It is noted in the report that the highly volatile and rapidly evolving security situation in north-east Nigeria often resulted in limited access for the United Nations, hindering the ability to verify violations. However, trends are presented and information is provided in the report on verified violations, including a large number of children recruited and used by the Civilian Joint Task Force in previous years, as well as on sexual violence, abduction and the use of children, especially girls, as carriers of improvised explosive devices by Boko Haram. The detention of children for their alleged association with Boko Haram is also highlighted as an issue of concern.

The report contains recommendations to end and prevent grave violations in Nigeria and improve the protection of children.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict. It is the second report on Nigeria and covers the period from January 2017 to December 2019. It contains information related to the six grave violations against children in the context of the armed conflict in north-east Nigeria. Grave violations in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and the Niger are also reflected because of the regional spillover of Boko Haram's activities and in order to give a more comprehensive picture of the situation of children affected by the conflict.

2. In my most recent annual report on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)), Boko Haram was listed for 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 hospitals and the abduction of children. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was listed for the recruitment and use of children and signed an action plan to address the violation in September 2017.

3. The information contained in the present report was documented and verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Nigeria, which is co-chaired by the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Access to many locations in north-east Nigeria deteriorated during the reporting period, making it challenging for the country task force to verify grave violations. Some areas, especially in northern Borno State, such as Abadam, Marte, Kukawa and some locations close to the Sambisa forest, including villages around Chibok, Damboa and Askira Uba, which are active areas of operation of Boko Haram, remained inaccessible, likely resulting in grave violations being underreported or unverified.

II. Overview of the political, military and security situation

A. Political developments

4. In February 2019, presidential and legislative elections were conducted in Nigeria following a generally peaceful campaign. The incumbent President, Muhammadu Buhari, was re-elected and sworn into office on 29 May. He unveiled his Cabinet in August.

5. The state of emergency declared in 2013 in the three states mostly affected by Boko Haram, namely Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, expired in 2015, but no formal communication was issued to confirm the lifting. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, the number of security force checkpoints was significantly reduced, allowing for greater free movement of civilians in the three states.

6. Following reports that the Nigerian armed forces might have been responsible for human rights violations in the fight against Boko Haram and in detention facilities, the army established a national inquiry in March 2017 to investigate the allegations. In August 2017, the President established a presidential investigative panel to review the compliance of the armed forces with human rights obligations and rules of engagement in order to investigate allegations of non-compliance by the armed forces during their fight against Boko Haram. The panel held public sittings, at which it heard from victims and witnesses. The findings of both inquiries were presented to the Chief of Army Staff and the presidency in May and December 2017, respectively, but reports were not made public.

7. In February 2018, the Ministry of Justice announced that 205 Boko Haram suspects, all adults, had been convicted by a high court in Nigeria for their involvement with the armed group. They were sentenced to jail terms ranging from 3 to 60 years. In addition, at least 526 suspects, including minors, were freed for lack of evidence. A girl and her 3-month-old baby were among those released.

B. Military and security developments

8. During the reporting period, the security situation was marked by ongoing conflict resulting from Boko Haram's activities, which aggravated the existing humanitarian crisis, including by affecting population displacement and food security. Sustained military operations by the Nigerian Security Forces, CJTF and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against the two Boko Haram factions, Islamic State West Africa Province and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, resulted in a reduction in the territory controlled by those armed groups compared with the previous reporting period (see [S/2017/304](#)). Nevertheless, the groups continued to pose a serious threat, leading to a protracted humanitarian crisis and widespread human rights violations, including the killing, maiming and abduction of children and sexual violence against them. Boko Haram also continued its campaign of abducting and summarily executing humanitarian workers, as well as suicide attacks on the population. Regions in countries bordering north-east Nigeria, namely the Far North Region of Cameroon, the Diffa Region of the Niger and the Lac Province of Chad, were also affected by persistent armed assaults by the armed group.

9. In March 2017, the Security Council visited the Lake Chad basin region to take stock of the situation, which led to the adoption by the Council of resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#) on 31 March, in which it addressed Boko Haram's presence and its threat to peace and stability in the region. In the resolution, the Council expressed concern about the protection needs of civilians affected by terrorism and condemned human rights abuses by Boko Haram, including killings, abductions, child marriage, rape, sexual slavery and the use of girls as carriers of explosive devices. The Council also called for those responsible to be held accountable. On 30 August 2018, Nigeria hosted a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, at which a regional strategy was adopted to promote the stabilization, recovery and resilience of Boko Haram-affected areas.

10. In 2017, Boko Haram continued to carry out raids on urban and rural settlements, as well as heavily armed attacks against Nigerian Security Forces positions and military convoys. It is a recurring concern that children, pregnant women and mothers with babies were used as carriers of explosive devices. MNJTF played a key role in the response to Boko Haram. In collaboration with the national forces of the countries affected by Boko Haram, over 7,000 captives who were being held by the group in March and April 2017 were reportedly rescued (see [S/2017/563](#)). The operation also led to the surrender of hundreds of Boko Haram elements. On 6 May 2017, following negotiations facilitated by international actors, Boko Haram released 82 of the girls who had been abducted from Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014.

11. The use of ground forces and air strikes by the Nigerian Security Forces to fight Boko Haram intensified from June to December 2017. Under Operation "Deep Punch" I and II and Operation "Ruwan Wuta",¹ an offensive was launched into areas in the Sambisa forest and the Lake Chad basin. Air strikes and ground offensives were

¹ "Rain of fire" in Hausa.

also carried out by the Nigerian Security Forces in local government areas of Borno State.

12. In early 2018, the Nigerian Security Forces, supported by MNJTF, pushed Boko Haram out of several areas in north-east Nigeria. However, Boko Haram continued to launch deadly attacks and remained a significant threat. On 19 February, Islamic State West Africa Province elements abducted 110 schoolgirls from Dapchi, Yobe State. A month later, the Government of Nigeria brokered a temporary ceasefire with the Boko Haram faction, leading to the release of 105 of the girls. In 2018, there was also an increase in the number of Boko Haram attacks against civilian targets, including internally displaced persons and humanitarian workers. For example, in March, Boko Haram attacked a camp for internally displaced persons in Rann, Borno State, killing at least three aid workers and abducting three others, all of whom were later executed by the group. The use of girls and women as carriers of explosive devices remained an alarming concern.

13. Persistent attacks by Boko Haram in 2019, especially in Gubio and Magumeri local government areas in Borno State, may be explained by the new Nigerian Security Forces “super camp” strategy adopted in August 2019, which consisted of the withdrawal of forward operating bases to consolidate troops into fewer but larger fortified camps. The strategy left many locations vacant, resulting in the almost unhindered movement of Boko Haram across Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States. The group also resorted to hit-and-run tactics, with a deadly impact on civilians, including children. In July 2019, in a single attack, 65 people were killed when Boko Haram attacked villagers returning home in Nganzai local government area, Borno State.

14. By the end of the reporting period, parts of northern Borno State were areas of operation for Islamic State West Africa Province, but still accessible for humanitarian workers to provide assistance. Other local government areas, also under the influence of Islamic State West Africa Province, were totally inaccessible. Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad was predominantly active in some local government areas in southern Borno, where access to humanitarian workers was granted.

15. By December 2019, 7.1 million people, including 4.2 million children, needed humanitarian assistance in north-east Nigeria, with over 2 million internally displaced and an estimated 123,350 living as refugees in Cameroon and Chad.

III. Update on parties to conflict

A. Boko Haram factions: Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad and Islamic State West Africa Province

16. In March 2015, the leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, pledged allegiance to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and changed the group’s name to Islamic State West Africa Province. In August 2016, Abu Musab al-Barnawi was recognized and appointed by ISIL leadership as the de facto leader of Islamic State West Africa Province. Owing to internal leadership wrangles and a shift in allegiances, two factions emerged, one led by al-Barnawi (Islamic State West Africa Province) and the other by Shekau (Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad). The former distinguishes itself from the latter by primarily attacking security forces using sophisticated tactics and by engaging in a “hearts and minds approach” towards civilians, filling a void in State authority. A change in the leadership of Islamic State West Africa Province in March 2019 seems to have led to a more extreme approach. During the reporting period, several villages and towns in northern Borno, close to the Lake Chad basin, were overrun and captured by Islamic State West Africa Province. On 23 February 2020, Islamic State West Africa Province was included in

the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad has been predominantly active in southern Borno. A third Boko Haram faction called Bakura emerged in 2019.

B. Civilian Joint Task Force

17. CJTF continued to fight alongside the Nigerian Security Forces to protect communities against Boko Haram. CJTF is based in Maiduguri, Borno State. Of the 27 local government areas in Borno, CJTF is present in all but 3 in southern Borno, where the presence of Boko Haram is limited. Following the signing of an action plan with the United Nations in September 2017 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, CJTF stopped recruiting and using children and has since separated from its ranks 2,203 boys and girls recruited and used between 2013 and 2017. This significant progress was the result of a progressive effort and a detailed road map for the implementation of the action plan, with support from the United Nations and humanitarian partners through the Ministry of Justice of Borno State.

C. Other parties to conflict

18. The Nigerian Security Forces and MNJTF continued operations against Boko Haram.

IV. Grave violations against children

19. In the present report, grave violations against children were attributed to Boko Haram when it was impossible to clearly attribute them specifically to either the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad or Islamic State West Africa Province faction. From January 2017 to December 2019, the country task force verified 5,741 grave violations against children in north-east Nigeria. The main perpetrators were Boko Haram factions, responsible for 3,179 violations, followed by the Nigerian Security Forces (329), CJTF (51), the Nigerian Security Forces and CFTF jointly (1) and unidentified armed elements (19). In addition, 2,162 grave violations attributed to CJTF that had occurred in previous years were verified during the reporting period and involved the late verification of cases of recruitment and use of children. The highest number of verified grave violations (86 per cent) occurred in Borno State, followed by Adamawa (8 per cent) and Yobe (6 per cent).

20. Despite a slight increase in the number of verified incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access, a significant decrease in verified numbers of the other four grave violations was observed. This reduction may be explained by several factors, including access constraints for the country task force to the most affected areas and the loss of territory initially controlled by Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad and Islamic State West Africa Province, as well as the implementation of the CJTF action plan addressing the recruitment and use of children.

21. Notwithstanding the decrease in verified grave violations attributed to Boko Haram during the reporting period and compared with the previous period, the two Boko Haram factions continued to represent a serious threat to children in Nigeria. In addition, following the expansion of the group's activities beyond the borders of Nigeria across the Lake Chad basin region, the United Nations verified 623 grave violations against children in the Far North Region of Cameroon, 217 in the Niger and 62 in Chad.

A. Recruitment and use of children

22. According to information gathered and verified by the country task force, the recruitment and use of children accounted for the greatest number of verified violations in north-east Nigeria. A total of 3,601 children (780 girls, 2,820 boys, 1 sex unknown) aged between 6 and 17 years were verified to have been recruited and used by CJTF (2,203), followed by Boko Haram (1,385) and the Nigerian Security Forces (13). Of the total attributed to CJTF, 41 children were recruited and used between January and September 2017 while the remaining 2,162 were recruited and used between 2013 and 2016 but verified as such during the reporting period. Within the framework of its action plan, CJTF granted access to the country task force to carry out extensive verification of children formerly associated with the group.

23. Of the children newly recruited and used during the three-year reporting period, the majority, namely 1,092 children (353 girls, 738 boys, 1 sex unknown), were recruited and used in 2017. The numbers fell to 301 children recruited and used in 2018 and 46 in 2019. During the reporting period, the country task force received reports of 76 alleged incidents of 1,886 children (1,827 boys, 58 girls, 1 sex unknown) recruited and used that could not be verified, highlighting the fact that actual numbers of cases of child recruitment and use may be higher.

Boko Haram

24. Boko Haram continued its campaign of recruiting and using children in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States, mainly through abductions. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 1,385 children (415 girls, 969 boys, 1 sex unknown) by the group, the majority of whom were recruited in 2017 (1,051), followed by 301 in 2018 and 33 in 2019.

25. Children were used by Boko Haram in hostilities as combatants and for intelligence, as well as in support roles such as cleaners, cooks and messengers. Girls were subjected to forced religious conversions and forced marriage and used for sexual purposes. For example, in July 2017 in Borno State, Boko Haram recruited and used 17 children (7 girls, 10 boys). Of the girls, 6 were used as sex slaves, while 1 girl and 10 boys were used as cooks, messengers and bodyguards. A total of 203 children (146 girls, 57 boys) were used as carriers of improvised explosive devices. A downward trend of such use was observed throughout the period. In 2017, 146 children (101 girls, 45 boys) were used in 77 suicide incidents; the trend decreased to 48 children (38 girls, 10 boys) in 26 incidents in 2018 and to 9 children (7 girls, 2 boys) in 7 incidents in 2019. Girls were specifically used to carry out the attacks. For example, in April 2018, seven girls aged between 11 and 17 years were used by Boko Haram as carriers of improvised explosive devices against a military outpost in Bille Shuwa, Borno State. As a result of the attack, there were over 100 casualties, including the girls.

26. Separately, with the spillover of Boko Haram's activities beyond the borders of Nigeria, the United Nations verified the recruitment and use of children by Boko Haram in regions of countries bordering Nigeria, namely in the Far North Region of Cameroon (135 children), the Niger (46) and Chad (32).

Civilian Joint Task Force

27. Until 2017, children and young people were encouraged to join CJTF, including by families and communities, in order to support and contribute to securing their neighbourhoods and villages from Boko Haram. Children as young as 9 years of age were verified as having been associated with CJTF. All the children were recruited from communities considered to be high-risk areas owing to frequent attacks by Boko

Haram, and mainly from the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council area and Jere local government area in Borno State.

28. A total of 2,203 children (363 girls, 1,840 boys) were verified as having been associated with CJTF between 2013 and 2017. The verification of these cases occurred in 2017 (41 children), 2018 (1,646) and 2019 (516), during the implementation of the action plan. Of the total, 342 children (10 girls, 332 boys) were used by the group as combatants, while the other 1,861 (353 girls, 1,508 boys) were used in support roles, including for gathering intelligence on Boko Haram, staffing checkpoints and conducting patrols, searches and arrests of suspected Boko Haram members. In a verified incident in July 2017, a 14-year-old boy previously associated with Boko Haram and arrested by CJTF was used by both CJTF and the Nigerian Security Forces to arrest 62 suspected Boko Haram members in a camp for internally displaced persons in Bama local government area, Borno State. At another such camp, in Ngala local government area, Borno State, two girls aged 14 and 16 years were seen conducting body searches of women and girls at the entrance in September 2017. In another verified incident, 15 boys aged between 10 and 16 years were seen staffing CJTF checkpoints along the Maiduguri-Konduga road, and others were seen participating in joint patrols and road traffic controls in Maiduguri.

29. Following the signing of the action plan in 2017, no new recruitment and use of children by CJTF was verified by the country task force. Since then, most children (2,188) disassociated from CJTF went through the symbolic separation ceremony, at which they were officially given an exit certificate and a reintegration package.

Nigerian Security Forces

30. The cases attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces involved the use of 13 children (2 girls, 11 boys) for menial jobs at military checkpoints during 2019.

Deprivation of liberty for alleged association with armed groups

31. Children aged between 12 and 17 years continued to be deprived of their liberty for their or their parents' actual or alleged association with Boko Haram. They were detained in military detention facilities at the Giwa and Maimalari barracks, both in Maiduguri, and denied access to their families. Contrary to information given in the previous report, the United Nations was not allowed access to the facilities and children, which significantly hindered support and documentation efforts, therefore making it difficult to assess the number of children in detention. Individuals who escaped from Boko Haram, including children, have been almost systematically treated as suspects and therefore subjected to arrest and detention for alleged association with the group. For example, in July 2017, 204 individuals escaped from Boko Haram captivity in Banki, Borno State, including 83 children (58 girls, 25 boys) who were transferred by the Nigerian Security Forces to the Giwa barracks, where they were detained for periods of up to two years.

32. According to first-hand testimonies, the conditions of detention of children suspected of association with Boko Haram or who had surrendered to the Nigerian Security Forces were of serious concern. Over 200 children interviewed by the country task force narrated their ordeal about the conditions. For example, the small holding cells, which were mostly overcrowded and extremely hot, made it difficult, if not impossible, to sleep at night.

33. During the reporting period, the Nigerian army released 1,591 children (1,045 boys, 546 girls) from administrative custody, namely 1,190 in 2017, 241 in 2018 and 160 in 2019. Children were detained for periods ranging from six months to two years. Most were released from the Giwa barracks after completing the "Operation Safe Corridor" programme, a deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme

run by the Nigerian army in Gombe State for former Boko Haram members who have voluntarily surrendered.

34. Once released, all the children were systematically handed over to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, which received them at a transit centre in Maiduguri. Even though the notice given for the release of children was usually short (a few days), it is considered a good practice as it affords the Ministry, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations the opportunity to provide integrated reintegration services.

35. Separately, the United Nations verified the deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged or actual association with Boko Haram in neighbouring countries. A total of 364 children were detained in the Niger, 57 in Cameroon and 26 in Chad. In the framework of the implementation of the agreement related to children associated with armed forces and groups signed between the United Nations and the Government of the Niger in February 2017, 42 children allegedly associated with Boko Haram were released from detention in Niamey. At the time of writing, the 57 children in Cameroon were still being held by MNJTF in Mora, Far North Region, awaiting relocation to the Cameroonian Institute for Children.

B. Killing and maiming

36. The country task force verified 1,433 child casualties (459 girls, 693 boys, 281 sex unknown) in north-east Nigeria: 801 children (275 girls, 319 boys, 207 unknown sex) were killed and 632 others (184 girls, 374 boys, 74 unknown sex) were maimed. The main perpetrator was Boko Haram, responsible for 79 per cent of the casualties (1,133), followed by the Nigerian Security Forces (280) and CJTF (2). A total of 17 children were killed or maimed by unidentified perpetrators by unexploded ordnance, and 1 child was killed in crossfire between the Nigerian Security Forces and Boko Haram. Furthermore, the country task force received reports of 505 child casualties in 89 incidents that could not be verified. Most verified casualties occurred in Borno State (86 per cent), followed by Adawama (8 per cent) and Yobe (6 per cent). A downward trend was observed, with 881 casualties verified in 2017, 432 in 2018 and 120 in 2019. The decrease could be attributed to several factors, including the loss of territory initially under the influence of Boko Haram and the lack of access to some areas in north-east Nigeria to verify violations.

37. Suicide attacks by Boko Haram were the leading cause of child casualties (578, or 41 per cent), accounting for 322 child fatalities and the maiming of 256 children. As noted in section IV.A above, one gruesome particularity of many of the suicide attacks is the fact that they were conducted by children used as carriers of improvised explosive devices. The increased use of girls to carry out such attacks represents a continuous worrying pattern. Of the 203 children used in this way, 78 per cent (146) were girls. While killing or maiming others, the children were often killed themselves.

38. In December 2017, two female suicide attackers, one a 14-year-old girl, strapped with explosive devices, attacked a local market in Biu local government area, Borno State, killing 19 people, including 7 children (6 girls, 1 boy), and injuring 56 others, including 22 children (5 girls, 17 boys). In January 2018, two girls aged between 13 and 17 years strapped with explosive devices entered the community of Dalori in Maiduguri. One detonated her device, killing herself and injuring 22 children (9 boys, 13 girls). The other failed to reach her target and detonated her device, killing herself only. On 8 November 2018, two girls used by Boko Haram as carriers of explosive devices were shot and killed by the Nigerian Security Forces as they attempted to infiltrate a security checkpoint established by the army in Adamawa State. Boys recruited by Boko Haram were also used by the group to commit suicide attacks. For

example, in May 2018, two boys used by Boko Haram detonated their explosives inside a mosque at prayer time in Mubi, Adamawa State. As a result, 3 boys, including the 2 used as carriers, were killed and 23 other children (9 girls, 14 boys) aged between 1 and 17 years were injured.

39. Other causes of the killing and maiming of children included aerial bombardment, crossfire, gunshot wounds during attacks on communities and unexploded ordnance. For example, on 13 March 2019, four children were playing with an undetonated hand grenade that exploded outside a school premises in Gamboru in Ngala local government area, Borno State, which left three boys dead and four others maimed.

40. Most child casualties attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces (280) related to a single incident on 17 January 2017, when a Nigerian army air strike accidentally hit a camp for internally displaced persons in Rann, Borno State, leaving 134 children (48 girls, 33 boys, 53 sex unknown) dead and 101 others (33 girls, 42 boys, 26 sex unknown) maimed. Other child casualties attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces were caused by the targeting of children suspected to be carrying improvised explosive devices or occurred during the course of the Nigerian Security Forces' response to Boko Haram offensives.

41. Separately, in the context of Boko Haram's activities beyond the borders of Nigeria, the United Nations verified the killing and maiming of 434 children (183 girls, 249 boys, 2 sex unknown), in the Far North Region of Cameroon (365), in the Niger (59) and in Chad (10). Boko Haram was the main perpetrator, responsible for 98 per cent of child casualties (424) across the three countries, including as a result of the use of children as carriers of explosive devices. Other perpetrators were government forces (8) and CJTF during cross-border operations (2).

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

42. Girls continued to be extremely vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and forced marriage. Forced and child marriage have been used by families as negative coping mechanisms to alleviate economic desperation and to deter armed groups from abducting unmarried girls.

43. Boko Haram remained the main perpetrator of verified incidents of sexual violence, which often occurred in the context of other grave violations, such as recruitment and use or abduction. Many of the girls abducted by Boko Haram were raped, forced into marriage and physically abused. As noted in my previous report, girls who experienced sexual violence continued to face stigmatization and rejection upon their return home, leading to further exclusion from protection and assistance. Some communities often feared these girls and their children, including when born of rape, and ostracized them because they suspected them to be Boko Haram sympathizers.

44. The country task force verified 64 incidents of sexual violence affecting 204 children (195 girls, 9 boys) aged between 5 and 15 years, attributed to Boko Haram (195) and the Nigerian Security Forces (9). Of the total, 131 children (122 girls, 9 boys) were verified as having been subjected to sexual violence in 2017, as well as 43 girls in 2018 and 30 girls in 2019. In addition, five allegations of sexual violence affecting 20 girls could not be verified. As in my previous report, it was challenging to document and verify the violation owing to the survivors' fear of stigma and lack of access to some conflict-affected areas by the country task force. Therefore, the numbers do not capture the prevalence of cases of sexual violence against children that may have occurred in north-east Nigeria, but illustrate the severity of the

problem. Limitations in access have affected service provision for survivors. Comprehensive medical and psychosocial services, access to justice and rehabilitation services are scarce in areas controlled by armed groups. Survivors often decline legal support owing to the fear of reprisals.

45. Forced marriage by Boko Haram was a common practice that mainly affected girls, but also boys. In October 2017, the country task force interviewed a group of 51 children (42 girls, 9 boys) formerly associated with Boko Haram who had been released from military detention. All nine boys, some as young as 12 years of age, were forced by Boko Haram to marry during their association. All 42 girls were also raped and/or forced to marry some of the boys or Boko Haram commanders. Upon their release from detention, 8 of them were pregnant and 21 others had given birth. In another incident, three girls aged between 12 and 14 years were raped or forcibly married to Boko Haram fighters while in captivity after their abduction, which occurred between June 2016 and April 2017. The girls were rescued by the Nigerian Security Forces and detained at the Giwa military barracks until their release on 15 January 2018. Girls were often held in captivity and sexually abused by Boko Haram over several years. In 2019, the country task force verified the cases of three girls abducted from their villages when they were as young as 10 years old. They were brought to locations in the Sambisa forest, where they were forcibly married to Boko Haram fighters and used to carry out domestic tasks. Two girls stayed there for four years and the other for 18 months.

46. Of the nine verified cases of sexual violence attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces, six occurred in 2017 and three in 2018. For example, in January 2018 a 14-year-old girl was raped by and later forcibly married to a military intelligence officer. In another incident, a Nigerian Security Forces soldier raped a 6-year-old girl, resulting in a vesicovaginal fistula. He was arrested and put in detention. In 2019, another Nigerian Security Forces soldier was convicted of raping a 14-year-old displaced girl. However, overall, the absence of accountability for conflict-related sexual violence was prevalent.

47. In addition, in the context of the spillover of Boko Haram's activities beyond the borders of Nigeria, the United Nations verified incidents of sexual violence against six girls in Chad (4) and the Niger (2), which were attributed to Boko Haram (3) and government forces (3).

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

48. In north-east Nigeria, the country task force verified 35 incidents of attacks on schools (13) and hospitals (22), the overwhelmingly majority attributed to Boko Haram (32: 10 attacks on schools; 22 on hospitals). The remaining three attacks on schools were attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces, jointly to the Nigerian Security Forces and CJTF, and to an unidentified perpetrator (1 each). Despite a low number of verified incidents in 2017 (5), an upward trend was observed in 2018 and 2019, with 15 verified attacks each year.

49. Attacks on schools included the burning and total destruction of infrastructure, as well as physical attacks against education personnel that involved, inter alia, the killing and maiming of teachers and pupils, the abduction of children and the detonation of person-borne improvised explosive devices within school premises. For example, in November 2017, an unidentified man allegedly affiliated with Boko Haram entered a primary school in Kwaya Kusar, Borno State, shouting and waving a machete. He killed two boys aged 9 and 10 years and wounded a 3-year-old girl, a 6-year-old boy and the teacher who attempted to stop him. Following the attack, the school was closed for four weeks, disrupting access to education for more than 4,000

children. On 19 February 2018, during an attack by Boko Haram on a school in Dapchi and the abduction of schoolchildren, a teacher was injured and the main gate of the school destroyed, leading to the closure of the school and affecting the education of more than 900 children. In December 2018, Boko Haram attacked a UNICEF-supported primary school in the village of Katarko, Yobe State, burning it to the ground. In February 2018, a joint team of Nigerian Security Forces soldiers and CJTF members set fire to a market, which destroyed five classrooms in the village of Alizaram, Borno State.

50. Despite the endorsement by Nigeria of the Safe Schools Declaration in May 2015, 18 incidents of the military use of schools by the Nigerian Security Forces were verified during 2017 (14) and 2018 (4). No new cases were verified in 2019. For example, in January 2017, the country task force verified the use of the Body primary school in Gubio local government area as the brigade headquarters of the Nigerian Security Forces, while the Nigeria Police Force used a secondary school in the same local government area. The schools were to provide access to education for at least 6,000 children in Gubio. The country task force was not able to verify whether some of the schools continued to be used at the end of the reporting period.

51. Attacks on hospitals also increased, from 1 verified incident in 2017 to 10 in 2018 and 11 in 2019. All 22 occurred in Borno State and were attributed to Boko Haram. They involved the deliberate looting and destruction of hospitals and health facilities, as well as killing and attacks against medical personnel. For example, in January 2018, in the context of an attack by Boko Haram on the Pallam community in Adamawa State, a health centre was burned and a security guard was killed. In December 2018, Boko Haram attacked the Ajari commercial area in Rann, Borno State, setting a UNICEF-supported medical facility alight and killing three non-medical personnel, including a boy. In 2019, Boko Haram vandalized the maternity and child health unit of Magumeri general hospital, Borno State, and set ablaze the only ambulance.

52. Separately, in the context of the spillover of Boko Haram's activities across the borders of Nigeria, the United Nations verified 5 attacks on schools in the Far North Region of Cameroon (3) and the Niger (2), and 19 attacks on hospitals in the Niger (16) and the Far North Region of Cameroon (3). All incidents were attributed to Boko Haram, except for one attack on a hospital perpetrated by unidentified armed elements. For example, in January 2019 in Mayo-Sava in the Far North Region of Cameroon, Boko Haram attacked a school, destroying two classrooms and disrupting access to education for more than 300 children. In July 2019, Boko Haram destroyed a mobile clinic set up and managed by a non-governmental organization in the village of Ngouba in the Diffa Region of the Niger. The United Nations also verified the military use of eight public primary schools by government forces in neighbouring countries.

E. Abduction

53. The country task force verified the abduction of 413 children (237 girls, 167 boys, 9 sex unknown) aged between 5 and 15 years in 79 incidents. The main perpetrator was Boko Haram (405), followed by CJTF (8). While there has been a decreasing trend compared with the figures indicated in my previous report, when the abduction of 836 children was verified, the number of children abducted by Boko Haram is believed to be significantly higher, as monitoring was hampered by access constraints. Most abductions were verified in 2017 (189) and 2018 (180), with a considerable decrease observed in 2019 (44). In addition, information was received about the alleged abduction of 81 children (36 girls, 27 boys, 18 sex unknown) in nine incidents that could not be verified.

54. Boko Haram continued specifically to target girls, who accounted for the majority of abducted children. The abduction of girls for the purpose of forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence, as well as to conduct suicide attacks, remained of serious concern. During the reporting period, the most emblematic singular incident of the abduction of children occurred on 19 February 2018 in Dapchi, Yobe State, where Islamic State West Africa Province elements abducted 110 girls from Bursari Government Girls Science Secondary School. It was reported that 5 of the girls died while being seized, while 104 were released in March 2018, following a temporary ceasefire between the Government of Nigeria and Boko Haram. One girl was not released, reportedly because she refused to convert to Islam. The United Nations provided medical and psychosocial support to the released girls, together with counselling for their family members. In a separate development in May 2017, 82 schoolgirls among the 276 who had been abducted by Boko Haram in April 2014 from a school in Chibok, Borno State, were released through a negotiation process between Boko Haram and the Government, with the support of international actors. Following reunification with their families on 20 May 2017, the girls were re-enrolled in schools in Nigeria and abroad.

55. In addition, the abduction of children in neighbouring regions in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger, in the context of Boko Haram's activities beyond the borders of Nigeria, was prevalent during the reporting period. A total of 221 children (151 girls, 70 boys) were verified as having been abducted in 65 incidents, mostly by Boko Haram (204), while 17 children were abducted by unidentified armed elements in the Niger. Boko Haram was responsible for the abduction of 117 children (70 girls, 47 boys) in 32 incidents in Cameroon, 73 children (62 girls, 11 boys) in 24 incidents in the Niger and 14 children (7 girls, 7 boys) in 6 incidents in Chad. For example, in a single incident in July 2017, Boko Haram attacked the village of Ngléa in the Diffa Region of the Niger and abducted 37 children (26 girls, 11 boys).

F. Denial of humanitarian access

56. The delivery of humanitarian assistance was significantly challenged by access restrictions, with over 1.2 million people inaccessible as a direct result of mounting insecurity, especially in northern Borno State. Humanitarian workers were also targeted by Boko Haram, abducted and, in some cases, executed. The country task force verified 55 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access to children, which were attributed to Boko Haram (29) and the Nigerian Security Forces (26). Most incidents occurred in Borno State, where the humanitarian needs have been the most urgent, followed by Yobe State. A total of 20,000 children, mostly internally displaced, were estimated to be affected by denials of access.

57. In 2018, the highest number of access denials was registered, with 33 verified incidents compared with 5 in 2017 and 17 in 2019. In November 2017, Boko Haram attacked a medical team carrying out a UNICEF-supported routine immunization exercise in the village of Zaimolo in Gubio local government area, Borno State, resulting in the temporary suspension of polio vaccination activities in five subdistricts of that state. In December 2017, Boko Haram ambushed 25 trucks contracted by the United Nations in a village in Ngala local government area, Borno State, while a humanitarian relief delivery to internally displaced persons was under way. The attackers killed four civilians and looted two trucks carrying food items. In March 2018, Boko Haram attacked the Rann camp for internally displaced persons in Kala/Balge local government area, near the border with Cameroon, killing three aid workers, injuring one and abducting three more, resulting in the evacuation of humanitarian personnel from Rann. On 13 December 2019, four aid workers were killed by Boko Haram after being held captive for almost five months.

58. Attacks by Boko Haram often resulted in the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities. For example, in April 2019, Boko Haram attacked a civilian convoy of a humanitarian organization travelling from Maiduguri to Ngala in Wulgo, Borno State. The attack left five people dead and six injured (all adults) and led to the suspension of the humanitarian mission to Ngala. Boko Haram threw two hand grenades into the humanitarian hub where aid workers live and work in Banki in Bama local government area, Borno State, in August 2019. Even though there were no casualties, the incident led to the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities and the evacuation of humanitarian staff.

59. Denial of humanitarian access by the Nigerian Security Forces involved the harassment of aid workers and the imposition of delays in the delivery of aid, as well as ad hoc inspections and unwarranted demands for money in return for passage. In September 2017, staff members of a non-governmental organization were physically assaulted by soldiers of the eighth division of the Nigerian Security Forces in Monguno, Borno State. The country task force reported the incident to senior officials of the Nigerian Security Forces, who promised to take prompt action. It is unclear whether action was indeed taken.

60. In the context of the spillover of Boko Haram's activities across the borders of Nigeria, the United Nations verified four incidents of the denial of humanitarian access in the Niger (2) and Chad (2), attributed to government forces and unidentified armed elements (2 each).

V. Advocacy and dialogue with parties to conflict

61. Following engagement by the country task force, on 15 September 2017, CJTF signed an action plan to end and prevent its recruitment and use of children. The Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice of Borno State also signed the action plan as a witness, signalling the constructive role played by state authorities in the process. The action plan was translated into Hausa and disseminated within the CJTF ranks. Soon after the signing, the country task force facilitated a one-day workshop with 35 CJTF sector commanders and senior officials to develop a time-bound and detailed road map for implementation.

62. An implementation committee chaired by the Ministry of Justice of Borno State was established, and a disciplinary committee to oversee compliance with the action plan and state laws was created. Child protection units were established in CJTF sectors, including at the group's headquarters in Maiduguri. The country task force organized several training sessions on child rights and child protection for CJTF elements, targeting in particular those sectors where most cases of the recruitment and use of children had been verified. For example, in April and September 2018, UNICEF organized workshops with CJTF commanders and members of the CJTF child protection units, as well as staff of the Ministry, on the identification and registration of children and on age assessment procedures. Awareness-raising activities were conducted with community leaders in the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and other areas in Borno State, with the support of the Ministry, to raise awareness of the content of the action plan and the commitments of CJTF. One important aspect of the implementation of the action plan was the conduct of 112 verification missions jointly by CJTF, the Ministry and the country task force to identify and separate associated children. To that end, CJTF facilitated access to its locations to enable the documentation and verification of associated children who were subsequently formally disassociated. By December 2019, 2,203 children had been formally disengaged from CJTF. Most of them (2,188) attended official ceremonies marking their separation.

63. The country task force, along with the Government of Nigeria, continued to advocate the signature of a handover protocol to facilitate the release and handover of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors. In July 2017, a high-level technical workshop was organized as part of the consultative process needed for the adoption and operationalization of the protocol. The event was attended by 25 representatives of key government institutions, including the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the National Security Adviser, the Nigerian army headquarters and the National Human Rights Commission. At the time of writing, the draft protocol was still pending signature by the National Security Adviser and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

64. Furthermore, the Government of Nigeria has acknowledged the need to promote accountability and bring justice to victims through its national legislation. However, little progress was observed during the reporting period in terms of accountability for perpetrators of grave violations against children. In October 2017, mass trials of Boko Haram suspects were organized and, as of August 2018, more than 1,650 individuals had been prosecuted. To date, all accused persons have been charged exclusively with offences under the Terrorism Prevention Act of 2011 and the amended Terrorism Prevention Act of 2013. It is worth noting that the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok in April 2014 was the subject of at least two proceedings leading to the conviction of two individuals. One of them, tried in February 2018 at the Federal High Court sitting in Kainji, Niger State, in western Nigeria, was sentenced for abduction, reportedly convicted for participating in and masterminding the abduction of the schoolgirls.

VI. Release of children and programmatic response

65. Through the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, the United Nations and partners supported the reintegration of 3,794 children (909 girls, 2,885 boys) formerly associated with armed groups. These comprised 2,203 children separated from CJTF and 1,591 others released from administrative custody for their actual or alleged association with Boko Haram. All were provided with reintegration support by UNICEF implementing partners, including to develop skills in microenterprise and business start-up, in order to assist with the start of livelihood activities. Younger children were enrolled in school. During the reporting period, under a government programme to provide back-to-school educational support, supported by UNICEF, 513 children (67 girls, 446 boys) formerly associated with armed groups and other vulnerable children were enrolled in school to resume formal education. Psychosocial support services, including for trauma healing, were provided to 733 children (130 girls, 603 boys) who benefited from reintegration assistance.

VII. Observations and recommendations

66. I strongly condemn the continued grave violations against children by Boko Haram. The large number of children abducted, recruited, used, killed and maimed and who suffered sexual violence is of serious concern. I urge Boko Haram factions to immediately cease all violations against children in Nigeria and in the Lake Chad basin region and abide by their obligations under international law.

67. I am seriously concerned by the increased number of children, mostly girls, abducted by Boko Haram, notably for the purpose of sexual violence, and used as

carriers of improvised explosives devices. I urge Boko Haram to immediately release all abducted children.

68. I strongly condemn attacks on schools, hospitals and related personnel, as well as the denial of humanitarian access to children, including attacks against humanitarian workers. I call upon all parties to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals and to allow safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors to affected populations.

69. I commend both the Government of Nigeria and CJTF for the constructive role that they have played in the adoption and implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by CJTF, including by facilitating the disengagement of 2,203 boys and girls. I encourage CJTF to fully complete the implementation of its action plan and facilitate the separation of any remaining associated children.

70. I call upon the Government of Nigeria to end and prevent the use of children to carry out menial jobs in some of its armed forces bases.

71. While the release by the Nigerian authorities of 1,591 children from detention is encouraging, I remain concerned about children still being held in detention for their alleged association with armed groups, about the long periods of detention and the fact that the United Nations has been denied access to detention facilities. I call upon the authorities to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims, and for detention to be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period, with the best interests of children and international protection standards as guiding principles. I encourage the Government to continue to coordinate with relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations, before the release of detained children, allowing adequate time for preparing the programmatic response. I also call upon the Government to provide unhindered access to the United Nations to detention facilities, in particular the Giwa and Maimalari military barracks.

72. I call upon the Government to expedite the review and adoption of the protocol for the handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors in line with international standards and to swiftly endorse the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.

73. I welcome the efforts of the Government of Nigeria leading to the release of abducted children, notably some of the girls abducted from Chibok in April 2014 and from Dapchi in February 2018. I also welcome the joint efforts of the Government, with the support of the United Nations and partners, leading to the reintegration of 3,794 children formerly associated with armed groups. I encourage the Nigerian authorities to continue to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive reintegration of all children released, as well as the provision of educational, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict.

74. I appeal to the Government to pursue its efforts to promote accountability by investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for grave violations against children and to ensure that all victims have access to justice.

75. I welcome the contributions of donors to the United Nations, civil society organizations and the Government of Nigeria to support humanitarian and development programmes, especially those that help children affected by conflict and facilitate access to education and health services. I urge donors to enhance their financial support to these programmes, in particular for the reintegration of children who have been recruited and used and girls who are survivors of sexual violence.