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### **Promotion and protection of the rights of children: promotion and protection of the rights of children**

## **Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict**

### *Summary*

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution [78/187](#) on the rights of the child, in which it requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to submit reports to the Assembly on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate and on the progress achieved in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda. In the report, which covers the period from August 2023 to July 2024, the Special Representative describes trends, issues of concern and progress made. She also provides information on raising global awareness and building partnerships, including her engagement with regional and subregional organizations and international partners. She outlines challenges and priorities on the children and armed conflict agenda and concludes with recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

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\* [A/79/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 78/187, the General Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to submit reports to it and to the Human Rights Council on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate, including on progress achieved and challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. The request stemmed from the mandate given by the Assembly in its resolution 51/77, in which it recommended, *inter alia*, that the Special Representative raise awareness and promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by armed conflict and foster international cooperation to ensure respect for children's rights.

2. In line with that mandate, and as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 78/187, in the present report, the Special Representative provides information on current trends regarding children affected by armed conflict and gives an overview of emerging issues and challenges. She also highlights the ongoing engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations, as well as efforts undertaken with a broad range of actors to raise global awareness and catalyse action on the issue. In addition, she stresses the importance of investing in and sustaining adequate resources for children and armed conflict in the current funding environment and the drawdowns of United Nations peace operations.

## II. Global overview of trends, emerging issues and challenges

### A. Trends in grave violations

3. A shocking 21 per cent increase in grave violations from 2022 to 2023 was caused by the changing nature, complexity, expansion and intensification of armed conflict; the use of explosive weapons in populated areas; deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including infrastructure; the advent of new armed groups, alongside acute humanitarian emergencies; and blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and severe violations of international human rights law. In 2023, the United Nations verified 32,990 grave violations against children, including 2,285 that occurred prior to and were verified in 2023. A total of 22,557 children (15,847 boys, 6,252 girls, 458 sex unknown) were victims of at least one of the four grave violations affecting individual children: recruitment and use; killing and maiming; rape and other forms of sexual violence; and abduction. The number of children who were victims of multiple violations (2,684) increased. The situations with the highest numbers of children affected were in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, Nigeria and the Sudan.

4. Killing and maiming, followed by recruitment and use of children, the denial of humanitarian access and abduction continued to be the highest verified violations in 2023. A total of 11,649 children, of whom almost 30 per cent were girls, were killed and maimed by parties to conflict, in unprecedented numbers, making such attacks the violation with the greatest increase (35 per cent) in 2023. The conflicts in which the highest numbers of children were killed and maimed were in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, notably the Gaza Strip, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine, among many other situations.

5. The use of explosive ordnance, including explosive weapons and remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and landmines, including in populated areas, were the main cause of the killing and maiming of children. These weapons have

disproportionate effects on children, youth, displaced populations and persons with disabilities, including after conflict ends. Child survivors often experience lifelong impairments and are likely to face resultant discrimination and stigma. These weapons imposed severe restrictions on humanitarian assistance, including mine action operations, impeded the reconstruction of infrastructure critical for children, such as schools, and caused the killing and maiming of humanitarian personnel, while increasing access challenges, including in Gaza, Myanmar, the Sudan and Ukraine.

6. A total of 8,655 children were recruited and used, and 4,356 children were abducted, with the highest numbers verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Nigeria. Almost 40 per cent of the abductions affected girls. The number of abducted children increased by more than 13 per cent in 2023 compared with the previous year. 2,491 children were detained for actual or alleged association with armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, or for national security reasons.

7. With 1,650 incidents verified, attacks on schools and hospitals and their protected personnel remained concerning in 2023, in particular in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ukraine, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. These attacks disrupted education for hundreds of thousands of children, depriving them of their right to education and health care, causing a detrimental impact on their psychological well-being, disrupting the fundamental premise of these institutions as zones of learning and safety and exposing them to heightened risks of other grave violations, such as an increased number of girls being subjected to abduction and sexual violence.

8. Rape and other forms of sexual violence increased by 25 per cent in 2023, affecting 1,470 children. More than 90 per cent of verified incidents of sexual violence were perpetrated against girls, but sexual violence against boys also increased. This violation continued to be vastly underreported owing to stigmatization, fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, the absence or lack of access to services and impunity and safety concerns.

9. Denial of humanitarian access increased by more than 32 per cent, with 5,205 verified incidents, often coinciding with an escalation in other grave violations. Safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access is a prerequisite for effective humanitarian action. The denial of humanitarian access took various forms, including the restriction of humanitarian activities and movements, interference with regard to humanitarian operations and aid recipients, disinformation and arbitrary detention, the perpetration of violence against and the killing of humanitarian personnel and looting. The highest number of denials of humanitarian access were verified in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Mali, Myanmar, Ukraine and Yemen. The denial of humanitarian access is expected to increase in several contexts given the adoption of restrictive laws, decrees and regulations that increase control over humanitarian organizations and personnel, notably in Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Sudan.

10. Gender norms shape the exposure of children to grave violations, as well as their differentiated impacts. Boys continued to be more affected by recruitment and use, killing and maiming and abduction, while girls experienced a disproportionately higher incidence of conflict-related sexual violence. Gender, age, ethnicity, race and disability were determining factors in adversely shaping the vulnerability of children to grave violations.

11. Approximately 50 per cent of the verified violations were committed by armed groups, which were principally responsible for abduction, recruitment and use and sexual violence against children. Killing and maiming, including using explosive ordnance in highly populated areas, attacks on schools and hospitals and related

protected personnel and the denial of humanitarian access to children were violations most prevalently attributed to the State actor's armed forces.

## **B. Importance of investing in and sustaining adequate resources for children and armed conflict**

12. In 2025, the General Assembly will renew the United Nations children and armed conflict mandate. The United Nations currently monitors and reports on 25 country situations and one regional monitoring arrangement under that mandate. Since the previous renewal alone, in 2021, the Secretary-General has added seven more situations. The Office of the Special Representative prepares some 15 reports annually, including reports to the Security Council, the Assembly and the Human Rights Council, in addition to periodic country-specific reports and four global horizontal notes.

13. The growing number of situations since the inception of the mandate reflects the growing number of conflicts, further compounded by the continuous emergence of new issues demanding this agenda's attention to end and prevent occurrence and reoccurrence of the grave violations that it monitors. For example, having added Haiti as a situation of concern in 2023, the Secretary-General reported, in his 2024 annual report on children and armed conflict ([A/78/842-S/2024/384](#)), verified violations that were attributed to armed gangs. He expressed deep concern about the indiscriminate armed gang violence and grave violations against children, in particular the killing and maiming and abduction of children and the perpetration of sexual violence against children in Haiti and underlined the importance of including child protection provisions in any political dialogue and solution between parties. There are also as yet unexplored challenges pertaining to digital spaces, including increasing protection risks to children in armed conflict, not least pertaining to the armed groups' tactics used to recruit and use children in their activities. Increased awareness of such protection risks is needed, as recruitment and use of children remains among the highest verified violations despite the progress represented by more than 200,000 children having been separated from armed forces and groups since 1999 through dialogue and advocacy efforts of the United Nations.

14. At the same time, as the demands in the implementation of this mandate are growing in the face of shocking trends, United Nations resources are diminishing owing to austerity measures and the departure of United Nations peace operations in a number of situations where the Security Council had explicitly mandated adequate resources to be allocated to child protection. Dedicated child protection adviser and officer posts are the cornerstone of the children and armed conflict mandate, and, without them, this mandate cannot be realized, as the incumbents implement the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism at the field level and agree and follow up on parties' commitments, including action and prevention plans, among other important tasks. As fewer positions are funded for the specialized child protection posts, there will be significant capacity gaps that will need to be addressed, and due consideration should be given to such an operating environment as the General Assembly negotiates the children and armed conflict mandate renewal in 2025.

## **III. Mitigating challenges to sustaining protection of children in armed conflict**

15. The incorporation of child protection measures and capacity within all pertinent mandates of the United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions aligning with the 2017 child protection policy in United Nations peace

operations and in accordance with Security Council resolution 2594 (2021) is critical. Their departure often takes place in contexts characterized by complex political dynamics and protracted humanitarian, development and peace and security challenges. These complexities are anticipated to continue well past the mission's departure: therefore, the development of comprehensive child protection strategies for the aftermath of missions is paramount for the success of these transition phases and to ensure that successes are sustainable, alongside host Government national protection strategies. Sustained political involvement is essential, both during and after a mission's withdrawal, to uphold crucial child protection priorities. In line with the broader United Nations reconfiguration, the establishment of a follow-up mechanism equipped with dedicated personnel ensures that child protection knowledge, data and capacity are preserved and transferred. The allocation of resources is critical in addressing foreseeable challenges and maintaining essential monitoring of grave violations and engagement with parties to the conflict and services such as explosive hazard education, victim assistance, efforts to reduce armed violence and reintegration programmes.

16. There are further ways to prepare for and address incoming capacity gaps on child protection. Increased cooperation with the resident coordinator offices and stronger staff capacity through dedicated training contribute positively. Broader training, such as through the self-paced online introductory course on the children and armed conflict agenda that is freely accessible through the web page of the United Nations System Staff College or the advanced training that the Office of the Special Representative is currently developing, should be offered to a range of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the agenda. To systematize such support, a dedicated capacity-building hub based in Brussels should be set up and supported as a mitigation measure under current circumstances. The Analysis and Outreach Hub in Doha of the Office of the Special Representative continues to serve a similar function, and her Office, in collaboration with the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism Technical Reference Group, which it co-chairs with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), continues to serve as a vehicle for meeting demand from the field. To this end, the Office is finalizing the development of a guidance note on the denial of humanitarian access in 2024 aimed at contributing to the monitoring of, reporting on and response to this violation. To bridge agendas and ensure that children affected by armed conflict are not left out of urgent political discussions, the Office of the Special Representative continues to research and analyse critical gaps and published a discussion paper in November 2023 that situated the agenda within the climate, peace and security discussions. Lastly, stronger partnerships with institutions in Brussels, Geneva and Vienna, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime would increase their cooperation in the implementation of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism.

#### **IV. Dialogue, action plans and commitments with parties to conflict**

17. Despite the changing nature, complexity, expansion and intensification of armed conflict, the United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting and the Special Representative sustained engagement with parties to the conflict to adopt concrete measures and yield progress to end and prevent grave violations. This engagement took place amid diminishing capacities, often in contexts of great hardship and under difficult circumstances, during a deadly year for United Nations personnel and aid workers. The continuous engagement of the United Nations,

including through the adoption and implementation of action plans with government forces and armed groups, led to progress to end and prevent grave violations. A summary of these critical engagements follows in sections IV A and B below.

## **A. Addressing grave violations against children by government forces**

18. In Burkina Faso, transitional authorities established a joint technical working group in 2023 to implement the 2022 handover protocol for the transfer of children allegedly associated with armed groups.

19. In Cameroon, the Government developed a road map to implement the Safe Schools Declaration. In November 2023, it validated at the technical level a handover protocol for the transfer and care of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors. Its adoption is pending.

20. In Colombia, in December 2023, the Government launched a plan of action to implement the Safe Schools Declaration. In January 2024, the Constitutional Court issued a ruling calling on the Armed Forces and the Police to refrain from conducting civil-military activities involving children in conflict-affected areas.

21. In the Central African Republic, the Government established a National Child Protection Council. The General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic and the Ministry of Defence appointed focal points for child protection.

22. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government established the National Reparations Fund for Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Other Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind. Cooperation between the Government and the United Nations continued regarding screening, age assessment and identification of children prior to enrolment with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police. Efforts to hold perpetrators of grave violations accountable continued, including for sexual violence.

23. In Haiti, in January 2024, the Government and the United Nations signed a handover protocol for the transfer of children allegedly associated with armed gangs to civilian child protection actors.

24. In Iraq, the Popular Mobilization Forces successfully completed the implementation of their action plan on recruitment and use in March 2024. Following a visit by the Special Representative in January 2024, the Government committed to establish a National Committee on the prevention of child rights violations as a successor to institutions established under the action plan. The Government also continued decontamination activities, as well as repatriation of the Iraqi nationals, including children, from Hawl camp in north-eastern Syria. It provided returnee children with assistance, including formal education, recreational activities, activities to promote national identity and resocialization, religious lectures and support to families to prepare them for reintegration into their communities of origin.

25. In Mozambique, the children and armed conflict working group continued training for the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces on child protection.

26. In the Niger, authorities continued to implement the 2017 handover protocol, including through the referral of 34 children to reintegration services, with United Nations support.

27. In Nigeria, in January 2024, the Government adopted an implementation plan for the 2022 handover protocol for children encountered in military operations.

28. In the Philippines, in March 2024, the Congress of the Philippines filed the proposed Magna Carta of Children, which enshrines the guarantees under the

Convention on the Rights the Child and establishes a Philippine Commission on Children. The Government finalized the protocols on the handling of children in situations of armed conflict for relevant departments and agreed upon strategies to disseminate the inter-agency protocol thereon. In December 2023, the Government presented an advocacy and communications plan on child protection.

29. In Somalia, in the context of its 2012 action plan and its 2019 road map for implementation, in July 2023, the Federal Government endorsed age assessment guidelines and its standardized checklist. In 2023, the Federal Cabinet endorsed the juvenile justice bill and child rights bill.

30. In South Sudan, in the context of its 2020 action plan, the Government cooperated with the United Nations, including through granting continued access to barracks for age screening, as well as with the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, which resulted in the release of 49 boys in 2023.

31. In the Sudan, in March 2023, efforts made by parties to the conflict with the support of the United Nations led to the release of 122 children.

32. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Nations continued to engage on the development of a draft action plan with the Government in 2023.

33. In Ukraine, in August 2023, the Government of Ukraine signed a joint prevention plan with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children in Ukraine. In July 2023, an interministerial working group on children and armed conflict was established to support its development and implementation. Subsequently, significant progress was reported, including the adoption of a revised plan to implement the Safe Schools Declaration. The Government of the Russian Federation continued to engage with the Special Representative to end and prevent grave violations against children in Ukraine, with practical prevention measures reported by the Russian Federation.

34. In Yemen, the Government continued to engage with the United Nations in the implementation of its 2014 action plan and 2018 road map and hosted the Special Representative in October 2023. The Government facilitated visits to military installations to verify and promote the directives to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, appointed and trained 80 military focal points and separated children from fighting forces. The Security Belt Forces and the Amaliqah Brigades participated in activities under the action plan and road map. In February 2024, the Joint Technical Committee endorsed standard operating procedures to provide interim care for children released or separated from armed groups.

## **B. Addressing grave violations against children by armed groups**

35. In Colombia, in the context of the peace negotiations, the Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional signed a bilateral ceasefire in August 2023 for a six-month period, and a National Participation Committee was established to promote the participation of all sectors of Colombian society, including children, in the peace process. In February 2024, the ceasefire extension included the commitment by both parties not to use children below the age of 15 in armed conflict, including in intelligence and hostilities, as part of the ceasefire protocol.

36. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Raia Mutomboki Kiriku signed a unilateral declaration to end and prevent grave violations against children following United Nations advocacy. As a result, 20 children were released. In the reporting period, more than 900 children were released from armed groups and handed over to the United Nations and its partners.

37. In Mali, in the context of their 2017 and 2021 action plans, respectively, the armed groups Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and Platform cooperated with the United Nations, enabling visits to military bases and the screening of combatants.

38. In Nigeria, the Civilian Joint Task Force continued the implementation of the 2017 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, in collaboration with the United Nations, including by providing child protection training to commanders.

39. In the Syrian Arab Republic, in June 2024, the United Nations signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children with the opposition Syrian National Army, including Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam, and its aligned legions and factions. In November 2023, the United Nations signed a road map with the Syrian Democratic Forces to prioritize the implementation of the 2019 action plan, including the reappointment of senior-level focal points, the establishment of an implementation committee and a military order reiterating the prohibition of the recruitment and use of children.

40. In Yemen, in the context of its 2022 action plan and following the engagement with the United Nations, the Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah) endorsed standard operating procedures and training on age assessment, as well as United Nations visits to military recruitment centres and a "summer school". In September 2023, the Houthi political leadership made a public speech instructing Houthi forces to prevent the recruitment of children.

## **V. Raising global awareness and building partnerships**

### **A. Awareness-raising, advocacy and country visits**

41. The Special Representative continued to use her voice as the leading United Nations advocate for the protection of conflict-affected children, including through the issuance of more than 25 press releases and statements, some jointly with partners. For example, in October 2023, she issued a joint statement with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In November 2023, on World Children's Day, the Special Representative issued a press release taking stock of the ongoing situation faced by children affected by conflict globally. The Office of the Special Representative additionally used social media as a tool for awareness-raising and advocacy and posted content strategically to support its mandate on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and Facebook.

42. The Special Representative sought to inform and engage media in advocacy efforts, including through national and international media outlets including Qatar News Agency, *El País* and *La Nación*. She shared information through United Nations platforms and channels and was interviewed by ONU Info regarding the situation in Haiti as well as by the information channel of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

43. The Special Representative continued to raise awareness through participation in high-level events. For example, in September 2023, in the margins of the high-level week of the General Assembly, she organized with Belgium, Malta, the European Union, UNICEF and Save the Children International, a high-level side event entitled "Working towards sustainable peace and development: putting children at the centre". In the same month, the Special Representative spoke at a high-level event to commemorate the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, co-organized by Qatar, the Education Above All Foundation, the United Nations



Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF. In June 2024, the Special Representative spoke at a high-level event to commemorate the International Day to Eliminate Sexual Violence in Conflict that her Office co-organized with Argentina and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

44. In March 2024, following consultations with young people in Africa and in collaboration with the Special Envoy of the African Union on Youth, the Special Representative launched a social media campaign aimed at raising awareness among children and young people in Africa, in particular conflict-affected children and youth, who are active on social media and digital platforms about potential risks pertaining to the six grave violations against children and possible prevention and protection measures. The campaign comprised one video and five social media cards in English, French and Arabic, published on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and X, which reached approximately 14 million people.

45. The photo exhibition entitled “From despair to hope: children beyond armed conflict”, featuring the stories of conflict-affected children told through portraits taken by photojournalist Paddy Dowling, was presented in March 2024 at the Bozar in Brussels in cooperation with Belgium and the European Commission.

46. Throughout the reporting period, the Office of the Special Representative has been developing a new global campaign aiming to elevate children’s voices in political negotiations and to push Member States to recommit and better comply with their legal obligations to protect conflict-affected children. This new campaign was a part of the pledge that the Special Representative delivered on Human Rights Day in the context of an OHCHR high-level event marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

47. In February 2024, with the support of Malta, and in cooperation with the United Nations System Staff College, the Office of the Special Representative launched a self-paced online introductory course on the children and armed conflict agenda that is freely accessible through the web page of the United Nations System Staff College. Based on this course, her Office is currently developing an advanced training course.

48. Amplifying the voices of conflict-affected children continued to be central to Special Representative’s work. In February 2024, students from the Albert Ier high school in Monaco were able to learn more about the children and armed conflict mandate. At the Security Council annual open debate on children and armed conflict in June 2024, the Special Representative’s Office, alongside Save the Children, facilitated the participation of a 16-year-old activist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Stories about conflict-affected children were included in the summary of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

49. During the reporting period, the Special Representative visited the following countries to advocate for the protection of children affected by conflict at the national and regional levels: Argentina, Belgium, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, the Gambia, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Luxembourg, Malta, Mozambique, Norway, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Ukraine and Yemen.

## **B. Building and supporting global alliances**

50. The Special Representative actively engaged with Member States and other stakeholders to build and support global alliances aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children. She continued to advocate with Member States for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

on the involvement of children in armed conflict. She encouraged Member States to endorse the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Mauritius and Rwanda endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. The Office of the Special Representative continued to participate in the Paris Principles Steering Group.

51. The Special Representative and her Office regularly exchanged with Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York, Geneva and in countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In October 2023, the Special Representative met with the Amman-based Groups of Friends on Syria and Yemen. In December 2023, the Special Representative provided a briefing to the Group of Friends for Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in preparation for the Summit of the Future. In February 2024, she provided a briefing to the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York and in Juba. In March 2024, the Special Representative met with the Geneva-based Group of Friends, and, in June 2024, she met with the New York-based Group of Friends. Her Office met regularly with the Groups of Friends at the expert level, including in Geneva in September 2023, Brussels in February 2024 and in May 2024, in New York and in Amman.

52. As a member of the United Nations inter-agency task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, the Special Representative supported the follow-up to the recommendations contained in the study, including by joining the task force advocacy brief on ending immigration detention of children. The Office of the Special Representative provided inputs for the pan-African report entitled *Deprived of Liberty, Denied Justice: Double Jeopardy for Children in Conflict Situations in Africa*, drafted by the African Child Policy Forum.

53. The Office of the Special Representative collaborated with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, including by participating in its advocacy working group. In October 2023, the Office provided input for the Alliance's key advocacy messages on child protection in humanitarian programming. In January 2024, the Office formalized its membership in the Alliance.

54. As a member of Alliance 8.7, the Office of the Special Representative continued to share advocacy messages to support the implementation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), of the International Labour Organization. In June 2024, on World Day Against Child Labour, the Special Representative participated through a video message in activities led by ILO to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Convention No. 182 (1999).

55. In February 2024, facilitated by the Special Representative's Analysis and Outreach Hub in Doha, her Office signed a memorandum of understanding with the Education Above All Foundation to provide educational opportunities for marginalized children and youth worldwide, support Member States of the League of Arab States in adopting the Safe Schools Declaration and conduct awareness-raising workshops on national action plans.

56. As part of the reintegration research group, the Special Representative's Office signed a memorandum of understanding with Princeton University to continue to engage the global academic community in supporting child reintegration efforts in conflict-affected countries by conducting research to inform good practices and operational needs at the field level.

## **C. Building partnerships with regional and subregional organizations**

### **African Union**

57. In September 2023, the Special Representative and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union discussed cooperation on child protection within peace and security efforts, including on child-sensitive mediation and child-responsive early warning systems. In November 2023, in Kigali, the Special Representative provided a briefing to the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa on children and armed conflict and outlined regional prevention measures. In November and December 2023, the Office of the Special Representative engaged with the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and other stakeholders on the issue of child-sensitive early warning.

58. In December 2023, in Banjul, the Special Representative provided a briefing to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its special open session. Participants included African Member States, the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts, regional economic communities and coordination mechanisms and partners. In January and February 2024, the Office of the Special Representative engaged with the African Union on the development of training on child-sensitive mediation and other partnership priorities.

### **European Union**

59. In September 2023, the Special Representative met with the European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography and the Managing Director for the Global Agenda and Multilateral Relations at the European External Action Service. In March 2024, the Special Representative spoke at the European Humanitarian Forum at a session organized by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and Belgium. In Brussels, she met with the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights and the European Commissioner for Crisis Management, as well as other high-level officials from the Service. She also provided a briefing to the Permanent Representatives to the Council of the European Union Political and Security Committee.

60. The Special Representative's Europe Liaison Office provided information on children and armed conflict to interested stakeholders and followed relevant European Union policy discussions. In November 2023, the Europe Liaison Office participated in the joint European Union-United Nations annual meeting on prevention, stabilization and peacebuilding and provided a briefing on children and armed conflict at the annual seminar of rule of law and justice advisers in civilian Common Security and Defence Policy missions and provided a briefing at an event on children deprived of liberty organized at the European Parliament. The Europe Liaison Office also provided a briefing to the Council of the European Union Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid, in December 2023, and to the Working Party on Human Rights of the Council of the European Union, in July 2024. The Office of the Special Representative supported the revision of the European Union Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict and the update of the Checklist for the Integration of the Protection of Children Affected by Armed Conflict into Common Security and Defence Policy Mission and Operations, both adopted in June 2024. In the same month, the Europe Liaison Office provided a briefing to Cabinet members of several European commissioners and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on children and armed conflict issues.

### **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

61. In December 2023, the Office participated in the United Nations-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) staff talks. During the reporting period, the Special Representative's Europe Liaison Office engaged with NATO counterparts on the implementation of the NATO Policy on Children and Armed Conflict.

### **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe**

62. In April 2024, the Special Representative spoke at a seminar on "Preventing and combating child trafficking in times of crisis and conflict" organized by the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

### **League of Arab States**

63. In September 2023, the Special Representative addressed the Council of the League of Arab States on the subject of combating violence against children and highlighted the challenges faced by children affected by armed conflict, as well as opportunities for enhanced cooperation and engagement with the Arab World to strengthen the protection of children, notably through the League's comprehensive plan to end child recruitment in armed and terrorist conflict. The Special Representative also noted the importance of education in preventing grave violations and ensuring the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict, highlighting the partnership with UNESCO in this regard through her Office's hub based in Doha.

## **D. Building partnerships with civil society and academia**

64. The Special Representative continued to prioritize enhancing partnerships with civil society organizations and academia. She remained engaged with New York- and Europe-based non-governmental organizations, as well as with civil society partners during her field visits. The Special Representative participated in dozens of events organized by civil society organizations, and dozens more were attended by representatives of her Office.

65. In October 2023, the Office of the Special Representative renewed its partnership with the All Survivors Project. In December 2023, under this framework, the Office, together with the All Survivors Project and the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University, hosted a workshop in Bogotá to discuss early findings from research on the reintegration of boy survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Colombia. In June 2024, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office launched, in partnership with the All Survivors Project, the final outcome of this research in a report entitled *Responding to Conflict-related Sexual Violence against Boys Associated with Armed Groups during the Process of Reintegration in Colombia*.

66. In October 2023, the Special Representative delivered lectures at the University of Malta Centre for the Study and Practice of Conflict Resolution and at the Mediterranean Academy for Diplomatic Studies. In the same month, for the annual conference of the Geneva Human Rights Platform, the Special Representative provided a video statement for a panel discussion on enhancing cooperation between New York and Geneva for the protection of children in armed conflict, jointly organized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, OHCHR, the Geneva Academy for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and Child Rights Connect.

67. The Special Representative and her Office continued to collaborate with the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict. This included delivering opening remarks and a training session as part of its Autumn School on the judicial and social aspects of violence against children, particularly girls, in armed conflict, in October 2023, and its advanced training course on international criminal jurisdiction and children in armed conflict, in June 2024. In July 2024, the Office also provided a training session on child-sensitive mediation as part of the Network's advanced course on mediation in international conflicts.

## **E. Building partnerships within the United Nations system**

68. The Special Representative continued to work closely with the Security Council and its relevant subsidiary organs. The Special Representative briefed the Security Council in April 2024 at a special briefing under the presidency of Malta. Her Office supported the organization of the Council's annual open debate on children and armed conflict hosted by the Republic of Korea in July 2024 under its presidency. The Secretary-General issued country reports on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan (S/2023/893), the Central African Republic (S/2024/93), Colombia (S/2024/161), Iraq (S/2024/247) and the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2023/805). Four global horizontal notes were issued to the Working Group. The Special Representative provided a briefing to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

69. The Special Representative pursued her cooperation with other United Nations entities. She regularly met with senior officials of the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UNICEF and with resident coordinators. In October 2023, the Special Representative delivered a statement at the annual specialized training course on child protection for United Nations military personnel organized by the Department of Peace Operations. Her Office participated in March 2024 in the launch of the Department of Peace Operations "Practice note on practices of United Nations peacekeeping operations to prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict". In June 2024, the Special Representative spoke at the workshop of United Nations peacekeeping operations child protection advisers and focal points. For the preparation of the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, she coordinated two task force meetings at the principal level comprising various United Nations partners that contribute to the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. Her Office also continued to provide guidance on security sector reform, as well as to the ongoing review of the United Nations human rights due diligence policy framework. In January 2024, the Special Representative met with the Executive Director of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, and her Office contributed to their report on the impacts of terrorism and counter-terrorism on children.

70. The Office of the Special Representative continued to cooperate with OHCHR, ILO, UNHCR, WHO and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs regarding their participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and common initiatives. In February 2024, the Office of the Special Representative provided input to the OHCHR study on the solutions to promote digital education for young people and to ensure their protection online. In March 2024, the Special Representative met with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with the Director-General of ILO. That month, she spoke at an online briefing on education in emergencies organized by the Inter-Agency Standing

Committee, and in April 2024, she shared a video statement for the opening ceremony of the 2024 Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks.

71. The Special Representative and her Office continued the implementation of the memorandum of understanding with UNESCO. In this framework, they jointly developed “Education for children and young people formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups: guidance for teachers and educators”, to be launched in late 2024. In September 2023, the Special Representative met with the Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO. Linked to education, in November 2023, the Special Representative shared a video message for the annual conference on Security Council resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#), organized by UNOWAS.

72. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. She continued to serve on the Steering Committee of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and in March 2024 participated in a principal-level meeting of the Committee, chaired by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

73. The issue of sexual exploitation and abuse was a priority for the Special Representative, and her Office actively participated in the work of the system-wide working group on sexual exploitation and abuse. In May 2024, the Special Representative took part in the meeting and retreat of the High-Level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.

74. The Office of the Special Representative continued its participation in the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, including in its annual principals’ meeting in November 2023 and the joint calls for action launched on that occasion. The Office supported the implementation of its 2023–2024 workplan, in particular the point on strengthening approaches to and the understanding of trafficking in persons in crisis contexts, and it joined the Group’s statement to mark World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

75. The Office of the Special Representative actively contributed to the implementation of the Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights. The Office contributed to the guidance note of the Secretary-General on child rights mainstreaming, adopted in July 2023, as part of the core group with OHCHR, UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative on Violence Against Children. The Office also contributed to the development of the Agenda for Protection, adopted in November 2023. The Office partakes in task teams responsible for the implementation of both the above instruments. The Office of the Special Representative also closely followed the negotiations on “A Pact for the Future”, ensuring the inclusion of language on children and armed conflict.

76. Regular communication with the Human Rights Council continued regarding child rights violations in situations of conflict. In March 2024, the Special Representative presented her annual report to the Council ([A/HRC/55/57](#)). During the reporting period, her Office provided input for the universal periodic reviews of Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq and Yemen. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Council’s special procedure mandate holders and engaged with four of its special rapporteurs and independent experts on common areas of concern. The Office provided input informing the November 2023 visit to Somalia of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia, as well as for the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children in May 2024 and the report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, in June 2024. In collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Office of the Special Representative developed a

research study entitled “Child trafficking in armed conflict” to be published in the second half of 2024.

77. The Office of the Special Representative cooperated with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to raise the situation of children affected by armed conflict during the reviews of States parties’ implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including by providing input to the Committee’s country-specific concluding observations on Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel, Mali and Pakistan. In March and June 2024, the Special Representative met with the Chair of the Committee, and, in June 2024, her Office provided a briefing to Committee members on the children and armed conflict mandate. In March 2024, the Office of the Special Representative, together with the Committee, the Office of the Special Representative on Violence Against Children, the République et canton de Genève, Defence for Children International, Save the Children, Child Rights Connect, Child Rights International Network and the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights organized a side event in Geneva on “Strengthening international accountability regarding violence against children in armed conflict”. Regarding exchanges with United Nations-mandated commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigations, the Office of the Special Representative met with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel and the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan.

78. In December 2023, the Office of the Special Representative published, at an event organized with nine co-sponsors, including the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, a study on the children and armed conflict mandate and children with disabilities in armed conflict. Her Office provided input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on peacebuilding and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in October 2023. The Special Representative and her Office strengthened cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In March 2024, the Office of the Special Representative provided a briefing to the Committee on the impact of armed conflict on children with disabilities as part of the consultations conducted for the Committee’s draft general comment on persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. In June 2024, the Special Representation spoke at a round table on the same topic held in the framework of the seventeenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

79. In December 2023, the Office of the Special Representative attended, on the margins of the twenty-second session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the launch of the revised policy on children of the Office of the Prosecutor, for which the Office of the Special Representative had provided input.

## VI. Recommendations

**80. The Special Representative remains deeply concerned by the scale and severity of the grave violations committed against children, including killing and maiming, recruitment and use, the denial of humanitarian access and abduction as the highest verified violations. She urges all parties to immediately end impunity and prevent the occurrence and reoccurrence of those violations; take all the necessary measures to achieve that aim, including the adoption and implementation of legislation criminalizing violations and abuses against children; and strengthen accountability.**

**81. The Special Representative is concerned by the continued trend of killing and maiming of children by explosive weapons and remnants of war, including**

the use of explosive weapons with a wide-impact area, including in populated areas, improvised explosive devices, landmines and bombs. She calls upon Member States to sign and fully implement international legal instruments pertaining to those weapons, including anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, and to comply with international humanitarian law. Armed groups must also refrain from their use. Member States should endorse and implement the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and promote and prioritize mine clearance and the clearance of explosive remnants of war, mine-risk education programmes for children, victim assistance and stockpile destruction, including prior to any movement by internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas.

82. The Special Representative calls upon parties to conflict to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as access by children to services, assistance and protection, and to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and assets. She expresses concern about the increasing use of schools as part of hostilities and stresses that it is fundamental to preserve their civilian character. She urges Member States to do their utmost to protect schools, students and teachers, as well as hospitals, health-care institutions and health workers. She further calls for the implementation of special measures to ensure the continuous education of girls.

83. The Special Representative calls upon Member States to ensure that child protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of the United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions in line with the 2017 policy on child protection in United Nations peace operations. During mission transitions, including start-ups, reconfigurations, drawdowns or withdrawals, child protection frameworks should be upheld, and data and capacity preserved and transferred. The Special Representative underlines the importance of mainstreaming child protection concerns in the nexus between early warning, conflict analysis, mediation, transitional justice and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

84. The Special Representative recalls the importance of the guidance note of the Secretary-General on child rights mainstreaming, adopted in 2023, and encourages United Nations entities, as well as United Nations country teams and humanitarian country teams, within their respective mandates, to ensure the strengthening of a child rights-based approach in the work of the United Nations, including in conflict-affected settings.

85. The Special Representative calls upon all Member States to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to endorse and implement the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

86. The Special Representative calls for long-term holistic, gender-sensitive and age-sensitive reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, specifically calling upon Member States and other reintegration actors to provide sustainable support for such efforts across the humanitarian-development-peace spectrum, and invites all of them to join the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers.

87. The Special Representative underlines the importance of data analysis and data management for the prevention of grave violations and, in addition to the Third Committee, encourages the Security Council, the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, as well as donors, to ensure that child protection priorities are concretely translated into



**the budgeting and staffing resources necessary to support data analysis, data management, monitoring and reporting.**

**88. The Special Representative calls for increased capacity-building for technical support and advice on the children and armed conflict agenda to relevant national, regional and subregional and international partners, including Governments, military personnel, the United Nations and civil society, and invites Member States to support this process.**

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