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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## Children and armed conflict

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

#### *Summary*

In her report, which covers the period from December 2018 to December 2019, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict explores challenges in ending and preventing grave violations and in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict. She outlines the activities undertaken in discharging her mandate, including by working with human rights entities and mechanisms, and the progress achieved in addressing grave violations against children. The Special Representative also lays out her advocacy activities, including through her focus on lessons learned and best practices. In addition, the report provides information on her field visits and on her efforts to engage with regional organizations and international partners. It outlines challenges and priorities on her agenda and concludes with a set of recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by conflict.



## **I. Introduction**

1. The present report covers the period from December 2018 to December 2019 and is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/155, in which the Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to submit a report to the Human Rights Council on the activities undertaken in fulfilment of her mandate, including information on her field visits, on progress achieved and challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. In light of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Special Representative also takes stock of its importance vis-à-vis the protection of conflict-affected children. The Special Representative further elaborates on her activities with regard to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 72/245 to increase her engagement with States, United Nations bodies and agencies, regional organizations and subregional organizations, and to increase public awareness activities, including by collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, in accordance with her mandate.

## **II. Convention on the Rights of the Child: a stepping stone towards protecting conflict-affected children**

2. Concern for children's rights and their protection brought world leaders together in November 1989 to make a historical commitment to children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is much more than a human rights convention for the protection of children and the fulfilment of their rights. It is the recognition that children, including those affected by armed conflict, are holders of human rights and should be considered not only as objects of protection but as individuals who can be agents of change by exercising their rights. It is the recognition that the strength of societies is tied to the flourishing of their children.

3. The Convention is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. Childhood, as separate from adulthood and lasting until 18 years of age, is a protected time, in which children grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity and without discrimination. The Convention was instrumental in improving the lives of children around the world, with millions of children being vaccinated, eating healthy, living safely and going to school and protected by laws and policies recognizing their rights. Conflict remains the greatest threat to those principles and to the realization of children's rights. In 1996, Graça Machel, in her report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306), emphasized the disparity between the horrific situations faced by children during conflict and the promises made by Governments in the Convention. For children trapped in conflict zones, the concept of childhood often stays a distant dream. During times of war, the vulnerability of children is compounded by the violence and turbulence that accompany conflict, and children are more than ever in dire need of specific protection.

4. Human rights continue to apply to situations of armed conflict to the extent that they are not supplanted by international humanitarian law. Accordingly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is at the heart of the international legal framework for the protection of children in armed conflict and a guiding source of operative principles and standards for the children and armed conflict mandate. Some of the rights contained in the Convention of particular relevance to the situation of children in armed conflict are the right to life (art. 6), the prohibition on recruitment and use of children in armed conflict (art. 38) and the right to protection against all forms of physical, sexual or other forms of violence, abuse or exploitation (arts. 19 and 32–38). In addition, article 39 provides that States parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of armed conflict.

5. Furthermore, the mandate on children and armed conflict, particularly in advocating for the reintegration of children, contributes to the overall realization of the rights of children, such as the right to birth registration and to acquire a nationality (art. 7), to health (art. 24), to an adequate standard of living (art. 27), to education (art. 28), and to rest and leisure and to engage in play and in recreational and cultural activities (art. 31).

6. However, the Convention is a starting – rather than an ending – point for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The standards contained therein have thus been further defined and complemented at international, regional and national levels. Of particular significance for the rights of children in armed conflict was the creation by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/77 in 1996 of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In parallel, Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) and subsequent resolutions placed the situation of children and armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council as an issue affecting international peace and security. The issue is also regularly addressed in the Human Rights Council.

7. As a complement to the implementation of the Convention and to the realization of children's rights, the Security Council created, through its resolution 1612 (2005), the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict mandating the Special Representative to collect timely, objective, accurate and reliable information to support, as appropriate, the protection and reintegration roles of national Governments, and to engage with parties to conflict to foster accountability and compliance with international child protection standards. The Special Representative was asked to report yearly to the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council on the progress achieved, to raise challenges faced by children in war with political bodies, such as the Security Council, and relevant Governments, to maintain a sense of urgency among key decision-makers, and to secure political and diplomatic engagement.

8. The creation of the Security Council Working Group on children and armed conflict, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), also represented a milestone, providing a unique framework to regularly engage the Security Council on the issue of children affected by conflict, bridging the gap between political action at the highest level and action in the field.

9. Twenty-two years after its creation, one of the milestone achievements of the children and armed conflict mandate is the global consensus that children should not be recruited and used by parties to conflict. This international norm was reinforced in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified by 170 countries and celebrating its twentieth anniversary in May 2020.

10. Over time the children and armed conflict agenda was further strengthened through political commitments such as 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 (the Vancouver Principles). It was also underpinned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, committing to leave nobody behind. Additionally, recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the progress made by States parties in the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as synergies between the Committee and the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, have been instrumental in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda.

### **III. Working with human rights entities and mechanisms**

11. With a view to achieving universal ratification of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Special Representative continued to raise the issue with Member States and actively engaged with regional and subregional organizations, civil society and regional groups on the matter. Following continued advocacy by the Special Representative and the United Nations in Myanmar, the country deposited its accession instrument in the margins of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly. The Gambia also deposited its accession instrument. The Special Representative further used her engagement with Member States to push for the

endorsement of other instruments that will improve the protection of children, such as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

12. The Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee continued to raise the situation of children affected by armed conflict in the national reviews of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Special Representative took note of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the report submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic (CRC/C/SYR/CO/5). The Committee urged the Syrian Arab Republic, inter alia, to fully implement Law No. 11 of 2013 prohibiting the recruitment and involvement of children in hostilities, and to take prompt measures to investigate, prosecute and sanction the perpetrators. It further urged the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure that no child is deprived of liberty for his or her real or alleged association with parties to the conflict, and that a child in this situation was treated primarily as a victim and referred to reintegration services or the juvenile justice system, as appropriate. The Office of the Special Representative will continue to work with United Nations colleagues in the Syrian Arab Republic to provide support for the implementation of those recommendations.

13. The Special Representative continued to cooperate closely with human rights mechanisms, in particular the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Regarding the Human Rights Council, the Special Representative submitted contributions to the universal periodic reviews of Iraq and Libya. During the interactive dialogues on Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Yemen in 2019, for which her Office had submitted contributions in the previous reporting period, States highlighted the protection needs of children in the context of the armed conflict in these countries and reiterated the points noted in the Special Representative's submissions. The Office of the Special Representative will support these States in implementing the recommendations relating to children and armed conflict.

14. The Special Representative continued her engagement with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council to exchange information and identify common areas of concern. In Geneva in March 2019, she participated in a panel discussion organized by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons and the Global Protection Cluster on improving the protection of internally displaced children, and in New York in October 2019, in a side event on protecting internally displaced children, organized by the Special Rapporteur. In June 2019, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 38/18, she met with the rapporteurs mandated by the Council to chair and facilitate the intersessional seminars on the contribution of the Council to the prevention of human rights violations. In July and November 2019, she had a discussion with the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Central African Republic and, in March 2019, she participated by video message in a side event on the situation of children affected by conflict in the Central African Republic and the peace process, organized in Geneva by the Independent Expert. In October 2019, the Special Representative had a meeting with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. The same month, her Office met with the Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. Her Office also provided inputs for multiple reports and field missions of special rapporteurs and independent experts and regularly collaborated with commissions of inquiry on situations of mutual interest.

15. Within the United Nations system, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to be an important partner for the Special Representative, including through its field level participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism. The Office of the Special Representative participated in the review of the implementation of the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces, with children and armed conflict concerns being a strong aspect of the policy. Her Office also closely cooperated with OHCHR on the implementation of child protection provisions contained in the compliance framework of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

## **IV. Challenges and progress in ending and preventing grave violations**

16. Protracted and high-intensity conflicts, cyclical spikes in violence, operations to counter violent extremism and cross-border operations by parties to conflict have continued to disproportionately affect children. Notwithstanding high levels of grave violations and challenges to protect children, important progress has been achieved in ending and preventing violations, including by improving accountability and securing the release of children from parties to conflict.

### **A. Challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children**

#### **Recruitment and use of children**

17. While the verified number of cases of children recruited and used by parties to conflict has slightly decreased in the last years, this reduction does not necessarily reflect actual progress on the ground but might be the result of difficulties to access and verify information. Volatile security situations, concerns for the protection of victims and witnesses, and financial and human resources constraints have continued to hamper verification efforts.

18. At the time of writing, the highest verified recruitment figures for 2019 were in Somalia and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Yemen. As in previous years, children associated with parties to conflict continued to be exposed to a multitude of other violations, including killing, maiming and sexual violence. In the Central African Republic, eight boys aged between 16 and 17 years associated with the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique were killed (four) or maimed (four) during confrontations between the Front and the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique.

19. Even when released or separated from parties to conflict, only a fraction of children benefited from sustainable reintegration programmes. Under article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and under article 6 of its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, States parties committed themselves to providing those children with all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration. Additionally, endorsing States reiterated in the Paris Principles their commitment to adopt an inclusive approach to reintegration, to provide support, including financial support, to enable the full reintegration of former child soldiers into civilian life. Despite those engagements and the recognition that sustainable reintegration programmes are essential for children and their communities, not all released or separated children benefited from such programmes in 2019.

#### **Deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with armed groups**

20. In light of the gravity and scale of the concern relating to children deprived of liberty for their alleged association with armed groups in conflict situations, the Special Representative continues to bring this matter to the attention of the Human Rights Council. In States such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic, children continued to be detained purely for association with parties to conflict.

21. Thousands of children actually or allegedly associated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and affiliated groups are deprived of their liberty. These children are highly vulnerable, they are survivors of heavy fighting and they have witnessed unimaginable atrocities. The latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/42/51), of August 2019, stated that detained children had died from malnutrition and untreated infected wounds, risk being stateless and lack access to education and health services, including essential psychological support.

22. There can be no security without respect for human rights, and military operations whose effects worsen the suffering of the civilian population can generate new, or aggravate real or perceived, grievances in affected populations with the potential to fuel

conflict further. Children actually or allegedly associated with armed groups, including foreign fighters, should be treated first and foremost as victims, and the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration. The detention of those children should remain a measure of last resort, for the shortest time possible, and their reintegration and rehabilitation must be prioritized.

23. The Special Representative welcomes the fact that the Human Rights Council reaffirmed these principles in its resolution 42/11 on human rights in the administration of justice, including juvenile justice. In line with the resolution, the Special Representative calls upon Member States to consider establishing or strengthening existing independent, child-friendly and gender-sensitive national monitoring and complaints mechanisms so as to contribute to safeguarding the rights of children deprived of their liberty. She also emphasizes that justice mechanisms, specifically for juvenile justice, have to be strengthened in affected countries. That requires that, *inter alia*, a minimum age of criminal responsibility be applied without exception, regardless of the gravity of the offence or whether it is terrorism related. The Special Representative recalls that the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system, encourages States parties to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years and commends States parties that have a higher minimum age (15 or 16 years). Children who exceed the minimum age of criminal responsibility but are under the age of 18 years should be prosecuted in a specialized juvenile justice system, without exception. The Special Representative also recalls that, under international law, it is prohibited to impose the death penalty upon persons who were under 18 years of age at the time the offence was committed.

24. With respect to the global study on children deprived of liberty, mandated by the General Assembly, the Office of the Special Representative continued to participate in the thematic research group on children deprived of liberty relating to armed conflict and national security. In March 2019, her Office participated in the final expert meeting on the study in Venice. On 8 October 2019, at the occasion of the presentation to the General Assembly of the report of the Independent Expert leading the United Nations global study on children deprived of liberty (A/74/136), the Special Representative participated in a panel discussion in New York on the topic and issued with United Nations partners a joint press release calling for an end to children's deprivation of liberty.

### **Killing and maiming of children**

25. At the time of writing, the number of children verified as killed and maimed in 2019 exceeded the verified numbers for all other grave violations, in particular in Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. In Afghanistan, children were killed and maimed in increasing suicide and complex attacks by the Taliban, including during the presidential elections in September, and in continuing high numbers of aerial attacks. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the number of children killed and maimed increased as a result of shelling and airstrikes in continued hostilities in and around Idlib. In Yemen, while the overall number of child casualties decreased, the number of children killed increased, including through airstrikes, ground fighting, improvised explosive devices, landmines and explosive remnants of war. Myanmar saw a significant increase of children killed and maimed, partly due to the escalation of conflict between the Tatmadaw Kyi and the Arakan Army in Rakhine State.

### **Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children**

26. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against conflict-affected children remained significantly underreported, particularly when perpetrated against boys. Stigma, fear, a lack of holistic services for survivors, widespread impunity for perpetrators, intimidation and access constraints to verify incidents are some of the challenges that contributed to underreporting.

27. At the time of writing, the highest figures for rape and other forms of sexual violence against children committed in 2019 continued to be verified in Somalia, followed by the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sexual violence against children was often perpetrated in the context of other grave violations. In

the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan, girls were sexually abused during their association with armed forces and groups, and forcibly married to combatants. Sexual violence continued to be used as a weapon of war, including to humiliate, dominate and instil fear in communities. Gang rapes were common, and some survivors of sexual violence were as young as 3 years of age.

28. The lack of information on boys who were victims of sexual violence continued to reinforce the perception that girls and women are the only victims of sexual violence in armed conflict. This situation reinforces stigma and discourages male survivors from disclosing their experiences, thus preventing them from receiving adequate assistance and demanding justice. In 2019, incidents of sexual violence against boys continued to be verified in Darfur and Yemen, as well as in Afghanistan, including cases of *bacha bazi*, a harmful practice whereby boys are used by men for entertainment and dancing and subjected to sexual violence. *Bacha bazi* continued to be underreported and verification was challenging because of the sensitivities involved, as well as security and protection concerns for survivors.

### **Attacks on schools and hospitals and their use for military purposes**

29. Schools and hospitals, as well as related protected personnel, continued to be targeted or were collateral damage. At the time of writing, the highest number of attacks for 2019 were verified in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, followed by the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan. Attacks on schools and hospitals also increased in Libya, impacting children's access to education and health care. In Mali, attacks against schools and hospitals included the burning of facilities, explosions, the destruction of school equipment, threats against education personnel, the theft of medicines, and the carjacking of ambulances and vehicles.

30. Throughout 2019 schools continued to be used for military purposes, thus eroding their sanctity as safe spaces and blurring the lines between military and civilian installations and exposing schools, teachers and students to attack. The proximity of armed actors to school environments also left children vulnerable to other grave violations.

31. The repercussions of attacks against schools and of their military use can be long lasting. If not cancelled indefinitely, classes may be suspended for days, weeks or even longer. Rebuilding or repairing the physical infrastructure, refurbishing buildings and reinstalling skilled teachers requires significant resources and puts a heavy burden on communities that can seldom afford them.

### **Abduction of children**

32. Often compounding other violations, the abduction of children continued to be a feature of conflicts in 2019, although continuously underreported. At the time of writing, the highest number of abductions for 2019 were verified in Somalia, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria. Children were often abducted by armed groups for the purpose of recruitment to bolster their numbers and sustain the economy of war or for the purpose of sexual violence. In Somalia, abduction was the primary way for Al-Shabaab to forcibly recruit children for use as combatants. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, children abducted by the Bana Mura in May 2017 continued to be held and used for forced labour and/or sexual slavery. In other contexts, children were abducted to pressure families and communities to pay ransoms or to pressure families who had deserted to return to the armed group, such as in Myanmar.

### **Denial of humanitarian access to children**

33. The year 2019 has witnessed a considerable increase in incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children in conflict zones. At the time of writing, verified numbers for the denial of humanitarian access to children had more than tripled for 2019 compared to those for 2018. Most cases were verified in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, due to an increase in both the denial and the delay of Israeli-issued permits for children to exit Gaza for specialized medical care. In Yemen and Mali, verified numbers exceeded those of 2018.

In Mali, the regions of Mopti and Timbuktu were particularly affected by incidents of violence against humanitarian personnel, equipment and infrastructure, carjacking and the abduction of humanitarian personnel. In Mopti, humanitarian interventions were hampered by the need to obtain special security permits from the Government for the movement of trucks and motorbikes. In Yemen, incidents mostly involved bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian movements, violence against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities, and restrictions of the movement of organizations, personnel or goods into the country. In January 2019, in the districts of Qatabir and Munabbih, Sa'dah Governorate, the Houthis prevented the United Nations from delivering food intended for close to 2,000 children under the age of 2 years and more than 5,000 pregnant and/or lactating women.

## **B. Progress in ending and preventing grave violations against children**

34. While the number of grave violations against children remained high, important progress to end and prevent violations was achieved during the reporting period.

35. In Afghanistan, the law on protecting child rights (Child Act) was enacted in March 2019 by Presidential Decree. While the criminalization of bacha bazi and child recruitment was included in the revised Penal Code of 2018, the Child Act provides specific protection measures. The Child Act was a priority of the road map of 2014 for the implementation of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces action plan of 2011 signed with the United Nations. On 16 June 2019, the national commission on the protection of child rights, established by the Child Act to oversee and evaluate its implementation and coordinate all stakeholders, held its first meeting.

36. In the Central African Republic, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Families and the Protection of Children submitted to Parliament for adoption during the third quarter of 2019 a new law on child protection, which includes the criminalization of the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups. In June and August 2019, following advocacy by the United Nations, the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique and the Union patriotique pour la paix en Centrafrique each signed action plans to end and prevent child recruitment and use, sexual violence against children, the killing and maiming of children, and attacks against schools and hospitals, and to undertake preventive measures regarding abductions and the denial of humanitarian access.

37. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations engaged with 24 factions of armed groups, leading to the signature of unilateral road maps to end child recruitment and use and other grave violations. Up until September 2019, 1,221 children had been released as a result.

38. Concerning Mali, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad organized several workshops for its commanders and members to raise awareness on children's rights and the action plan of 2017 with the United Nations. Dialogue and capacity-building activities were conducted with the Plateforme and the Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad, which joined the Plateforme in July 2019, to elicit commitments to end and prevent grave violations against children and to release children from their ranks.

39. In Myanmar, as welcomed in Human Rights Council resolution 42/3 on the situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar, the new law on children's rights was enacted on 29 July 2019, with a dedicated chapter on children and armed conflict criminalizing all six grave violations. In January 2019, the interministerial committee on preventing grave violations against children in armed conflict was established by Presidential Order. In September 2019, the Government ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

40. In Nigeria, within the framework of the Civilian Joint Task Force action plan of 2017, the United Nations conducted 37 verification missions between January and September 2019, which led to the identification and separation of 571 children used by the Civilian Joint Task Force between 2013 and 2017.

41. In the Philippines, the law on children in situations of armed conflict was enacted on 10 January 2019. This legislation contains important provisions to improve the protection

of children, including measures towards accountability for grave violations against children.

42. In Somalia, in October 2019, the Federal Government, the Ministry of Defence and the Special Representative signed a road map to accelerate the implementation of the action plans of 2012 to end and prevent child recruitment and use, and the killing and maiming of children, and to implement preventative measures on sexual violence.

43. In South Sudan, in view of revising the action plan of 2012 on child recruitment and use, the United Nations hosted in February 2019 a workshop with the South Sudan security forces, including the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, government ministries, parties integrating into the Defence Forces, civil society, United Nations system entities and the Office of the Special Representative. At the time of writing, the draft action plan was under review by the Government. Further, in April 2019, a joint verification committee consisting of the Defence Forces, the Pro-Machar Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition, the South Sudan Opposition Alliance, the Taban Deng-allied South Sudan People's Defence Forces, the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was established to visit military deployments and cantonment sites to screen and release children associated with armed forces and groups. At least 88 children were identified as associated with the Defence Forces, the Pro-Machar Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance between April and September 2019 and were released.

44. In June 2019 in the Syrian Arab Republic, after months of engagement, in coordination with the Special Representative, an action plan was signed between the United Nations and the Syrian Democratic Forces to end and prevent child recruitment and use.

45. Sustained engagement resulted in the signature of a memorandum of understanding between the coalition force commander and the United Nations to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict in Yemen in Riyadh in March 2019. The memorandum of understanding contains key provisions on child protection and creates a political framework for the development of a workplan to prevent the killing and maiming of children in military operations by the coalition in Yemen. The Government of Yemen adopted a road map in December 2018 to revitalize the implementation of its action plan of 2014 on ending and preventing child recruitment and use. A joint technical committee composed of key ministries and departments was established to support the implementation of the road map, and trainings were conducted by the United Nations with focal points of the armed forces of Yemen in April and May 2019.

### **C. Progress in achieving accountability for grave violations against children**

46. As affirmed by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 42/17 on human rights and transitional justice, impunity for gross violations and abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law encourages their recurrence. Accountability measures are vital to promote the rule of law, provide reparations to victims, prevent future violations and deter repetition by imposing legitimate consequences for perpetrators, and, ultimately, end the cycle of violence and contribute to sustaining peace and development. The failure to hold perpetrators to account is an infringement on children's right to justice and can hamper their recovery. Fighting impunity and bringing perpetrators to account should be a key element in any response to grave violations against children.

47. At the national level, important progress was made, for instance, by judicial authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in implementing, with the support of the United Nations, the child protection law of 2009, which stipulates that child recruitment is a crime punishable by up to 20 years of imprisonment. On 1 February 2019, Marcel Habarugira Rangira, a former officer of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who joined Nyatura as a commander, was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment for child recruitment and use. In August 2019, the trial of Cobra Matata, former leader of

the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri, for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including child recruitment and use and sexual violence, began. The trial of Cheka, former commander of Nduma défense du Congo-Cheka, for war crimes, including child recruitment and use and sexual violence, is ongoing. Additionally, the sentencing in 2018 of Dominique Buyenge Birihanze, former commander of the Patriotes résistants congolais, to life imprisonment for child recruitment was confirmed on appeal in 2019.

48. Incorporating the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and criminalizing grave violations against children in national legislation are important steps to lay the foundation to hold perpetrators to account. As mentioned above, legislative measures were taken in 2019 to that end by several countries on the children and armed conflict agenda.

49. Throughout 2019 the Special Representative continued to encourage States to prioritize accountability efforts. She regularly called for the adoption of legislation criminalizing grave violations against children and for the swift investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, while respecting due process. She also continued to advocate for the inclusion and implementation of accountability provisions in action plans signed between the United Nations and parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (A/73/907–S/2019/509).

50. At the international level, on 7 November 2019, the International Criminal Court sentenced Bosco Ntaganda, former Deputy Chief of Staff and Commander of Operations of the Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix/Forces patriotiques pour la libération du Congo, to 30 years of imprisonment for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed between 2002 and 2003 in Ituri, Democratic Republic of the Congo, including rape, sexual slavery, and enlisting and conscripting children under 15 years of age into an armed group and using them to participate actively in hostilities. On 11 December 2019, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court confirmed charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity against Alfred Yekatom (alias Rambo) and Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona, both former anti-balaka leaders in the Central African Republic. In confirming the charges, it found that there were substantial grounds to believe that Alfred Yekatom had committed the war crime of recruiting and using children under the age of 15 years to participate in hostilities.

## **V. Awareness-raising and mobilizing global action**

51. Throughout 2019 the Special Representative continued to raise public awareness and mobilize global action, including through field visits, the launch of a new campaign, the collection of best practices and lessons learned, the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers and engagement with a broad range of actors.

### **A. Field visits**

52. The Special Representative and her Office continued to use visits to countries on the children and armed conflict agenda and international high-level events to raise awareness and advocate for the protection of children affected by conflict.

53. In January and March 2019, the Special Representative travelled to Riyadh, the headquarters of the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen, to sign a memorandum of understanding to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict in Yemen.

54. In May 2019, the Special Representative visited the Central African Republic and met with, among others, senior government officials and representatives of armed groups who were signatories to the agreement for peace and reconciliation in 2019. She advocated for the full implementation of the action plan of 2018, signed by the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique and called upon other listed armed groups to adopt and implement action plans. As previously mentioned, two new action plans were signed in June and August 2019. The Special Representative also encouraged the Government to develop a national plan to prevent grave violations against children. In Bangui and Kaga Bandoro, she

met with children formerly associated with armed groups who were enrolled in reintegration programmes.

55. The Special Representative visited Mali in July 2019 to engage with, among others, the Government, armed groups who were signatories to the agreement for peace and reconciliation of 2015, international actors present in the country and civil society. She called upon all relevant parties to fully implement the protocol on the transfer of children captured in military operations to civilian child protection actors. She urged armed group leaders to release all children from their ranks and to end grave violations. She encouraged the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad to fully implement their action plan of 2017 and called upon Plateforme, listed for child recruitment and use, to adopt an action plan. The Special Representative also witnessed the creation of a new Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, co-chaired by Belgium and the Niger.

56. In October 2019, the Special Representative visited Somalia to discuss with the Federal Government of Somalia the implementation of its action plans of 2012 to end and prevent the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children, including through the signing of a road map with the Minister of Defence to expedite implementation. The Special Representative raised concerns about the increasing number of violations attributed to federal member state security forces. She also visited Baidoa, South-West State, to assess first-hand the harsh reality of children affected by conflict and engage with regional authorities. Together with the Ministry of Defence, she launched a peacebuilding fund project supporting the prevention of child recruitment and the identification, separation and community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

57. Furthermore, in Ottawa in February 2019, the Special Representative attended the international review workshop on the implementation guidance for the Vancouver Principles. In March 2019, she participated in the interactive dialogue on children and armed conflict, held in Geneva during the fortieth session of the Human Rights Council. In Palma de Mallorca, Spain, in May 2019, she attended the Third International Conference on Safe Schools.

## **B. New global campaign and advocacy**

### **New global campaign: “Act to protect children affected by armed conflict”**

58. In April 2019, the Special Representative launched the new media and advocacy campaign “Act to protect children affected by armed conflict”. The campaign, which will run until the end of 2022, is aimed at widening the reach of the previous “Children not Soldiers” campaign by focusing on all six grave violations in an effort to promote a holistic approach when responding to violations against children. It is also aimed at positioning the issue of children and armed conflict at the heart of the peacebuilding, humanitarian, development and prevention agendas.

59. The campaign was developed in consultation with various United Nations partners, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, as well as civil society organizations and States Members of the United Nations. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, Forest Whitaker, lent his support to the campaign.

60. “Act to protect children affected by armed conflict” was launched globally in New York on 2 April 2019 in an event co-sponsored by the European Union and the African Union. Launches in Brussels in April 2019, together with the European Parliament, and in Bangkok in August 2019, together with United Nations partners, will be followed by further regional launches in 2020.

61. Several countries on the children and armed conflict agenda took ownership of the campaign, and national launches took place, including in the Central African Republic in May 2019, in Somalia in June 2019 and in Mali in July 2019. Communication products

have been developed in Arabic, English, French and Spanish to facilitate the dissemination of advocacy messages.

### **Advocacy**

62. As part of her advocacy efforts, the Special Representative issued at least 50 public statements in 2019, including a joint statement on human rights and humanitarian concerns relating to conflict-affected women and children in Iraq and in the Syrian Arab Republic, together with the Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

63. The Special Representative also published two joint press releases with the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, including on the sentencing of Bosco Ntaganda by the International Criminal Court. Further, joint press releases were issued on the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, and on the Day of the African Child with the Peace and Security Department of the African Union.

## **C. Collecting best practices and lessons learned**

64. As encouraged by the Security Council in a statement by its President (S/PRST/2017/21), the Office of the Special Representative, together with relevant child protection actors, continued to carry out lessons learned initiatives in order to compile comprehensive best practices on the children and armed conflict mandate, including practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes.

65. In July 2018, a consultative process with child protection and mediation actors was launched to develop practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues into peace processes, in collaboration with the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UNICEF. The documentation and analysis of experiences in integrating child protection issues into peace processes garnered by the Office of the Special Representative and other child protection and mediation actors over the course of the past years was an important starting point for the development of such guidance. Within this framework, the Special Representative convened in Geneva in November 2018 a meeting of protection and mediation actors, and co-organized in Brussels in October 2019 with the Government of Belgium and the European Institute of Peace a high-level consultation. The latter event brought together senior diplomats, experienced mediators and child protection actors to discuss challenges faced on the ground, highlight lessons learned and share recommendations on the integration of child protection issues into peace processes. The guidance will be launched in February 2020.

66. During a side event entitled “Children and armed conflict: protecting children during and after war” organized by Argentina, Belgium, Norway, Spain and Uruguay, in cooperation with UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children International and World Vision International, as part of the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva in June 2019, the Office of the Special Representative presented the process for elaborating the guidance.

67. As mentioned in her previous report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/40/49), the Special Representative, in cooperation with UNICEF, launched in 2018 a series of regional workshops bringing together members of United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting. A second workshop was held in Nairobi in January 2019, bringing together the co-chairs of the country task forces from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan, as well as the regional directors of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. A third consultation was held in Bangkok in August 2019. A fourth consultation will be held in Dakar in January 2020.

68. To collate lessons learned and best practices, the Office of the Special Representative undertook missions to the Philippines and Uganda. In the Philippines in December 2018, the Office participated in an event on reintegration best practices in Mindanao, sponsored by the Government of Belgium, and travelled to the south of the country. Meetings were held with United Nations entities, government officials, leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and disengaged child soldiers of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and their families. During the mission to Uganda in March 2019, visits were conducted to the north of the country, particularly affected by grave violations against children during the conflict. Interviews were held with former child soldiers, affected children and stakeholders working on child protection issues to record their assessment of the situation, both then and now. The collected evidence and stories were collated and put into a lessons-learned file for further dissemination to practitioners.

#### **D. Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers**

69. As mentioned in her previous report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/40/49), the Special Representative launched in 2018 the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers to generate new ideas for addressing sustainable support for child reintegration programmes. The Global Coalition is co-led by UNICEF and composed of child protection experts from the United Nations and civil society organizations, as well as the World Bank, academia and States Members of the United Nations. An expert advisory group, a steering committee and a group of friends were set up to advise the Global Coalition.

70. Throughout 2019 consultations were held with global academia, local and international non-governmental organizations, States Members of the United Nations, financing experts, international organizations, and former child soldiers and affected children. For instance, on 25 February 2019, the first meeting of the group of friends of reintegration was held in New York under the chairmanship of Kazakhstan, Malta and France. On 11 and 12 June 2019, a consultation meeting with former child soldiers and children affected by conflict took place in New York with partners from Sierra Leone, South Sudan and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, among others. On 22 July 2019, the Office of the Special Representative organized, together with UNICEF and the Republic of Korea, a side event entitled “Horizons for child reintegration: emerging data on how to assist children to recover their lives”. On 26 November 2019, Belgium, Peru, Poland and the United Kingdom co-hosted an Arria formula meeting on the issue of child reintegration, with an emphasis on bridging the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

71. Three papers elaborated within this framework will be publicly launched at the beginning of 2020. The subjects of these papers are: gaps and needs of children associated with armed forces or armed groups’ successful reintegration; reframing child reintegration, from humanitarian action to development, peacebuilding, prevention and beyond; and financing support for child reintegration. The next phase of the work of the Global Coalition will be outlined at the public launch.

#### **E. Prevention of grave violations against children**

72. The prevention of violations against children in armed conflict is a crucial element in building and sustaining peace, as well as in ensuring that children realize their rights and tap into their potential as agents of change. In support of the Secretary-General’s vision on prevention, the Sustainable Development Goals and sustaining peace resolutions, the Special Representative and the Government of the Central African Republic discussed the development of a national plan to prevent grave violations against children during her mission to the country in May 2019. To support the Government towards that end, her Office undertook an evaluation mission to the Central African Republic in November 2019.

73. The development and expansion of regional and subregional prevention initiatives encouraged in Security Council resolution 2427 (2018) would both sustain the gains made

through national action plans beyond the duration of those plans and systematize preventive measures across regions to enhance the protection of children on a long-term basis. Within this framework and as further outlined below, the Special Representative and the signatory States to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region have engaged in preventing grave violations against children.

## **F. Working with regional and subregional organizations and providing technical and capacity-building assistance**

74. Developing and advancing existing cooperation with the regional and subregional organizations mentioned below remained a priority for the Special Representative. The Special Representative and her Office also engaged with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Andean Community and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

### **European Union**

75. The partnership between the Special Representative and the European Union continued throughout the reporting period. In April 2019, the Special Representative signed a memorandum of understanding with the European Parliament to establish a framework of cooperation on children and armed conflict. She also briefed the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the European Union.

76. The United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) provided briefings and trainings on children and armed conflict to experts from the European External Action Service and to human rights and gender advisers from the Common Security and Defence Policy missions of the European Union. In July 2019, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized with Belgium and Italy a seminar on “children and armed conflict: a discussion of European Union and United Nations frameworks of action and mainstreaming opportunities”. In October 2019, the Office participated in the European Union–United Nations senior officials workshop on humanitarian civil–military coordination, international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in Mali/Sahel. The Liaison Office further facilitated the engagement of the Special Representative with the Human Rights Council.

### **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

77. The Office of the Special Representative strengthened its partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In Naples, Italy, in July 2019 her Office supported the third training session on children and armed conflict for NATO child protection focal points. Her Office further assisted NATO in the finalization of an updated training package for NATO staff on children and armed conflict with a specific emphasis on the six grave violations. The virtual reality training package will also be made available to peace operations.

78. The Office of the Special Representative continued to cooperate closely with the Senior Focal Point on Children and Armed Conflict at NATO headquarters and will support the updating of the NATO policy document entitled “The protection of children in armed conflict: the way forward”, with lessons learned and best practices.

79. The Office of the Special Representative will provide NATO headquarters with dedicated technical assistance to assist in further mainstreaming and developing NATO activities in identifying and preventing grave violations against children in armed conflict.

### **Support for peacekeeping capacity of Thailand**

80. At the request of the Government of Thailand, the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF undertook in January 2019 a mission to affected areas in southern Thailand to discuss the protection of children with government officials, non-governmental organizations, teachers and children. Her Office, along with UNICEF, was invited to provide inputs to assist the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre and its committee on women and children to enhance training and prevention activities. Her

Office, along with UNICEF, also supported the Peace Operations Centre, a regional centre of excellence under the Vancouver Principles, in further developing its predeployment training on children and armed conflict.

### **African Union**

81. The Special Representative deepened her collaboration with the African Union. In Addis Ababa in June 2019, her Office participated in a brainstorming session with the African Union and other partners on cooperation and coordination on ending and preventing violations against children in Africa. In September 2019, her Office provided technical expertise for the African Peace Support Operations training organized by the African Union in Harare. In Addis Ababa in October 2019, her Office participated in the Pan-African Conference on Children and Armed Conflict. In addition, the Office of the Special Representative closely cooperated with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on a commentary on article 22, on children and armed conflict, of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

### **International Conference on the Great Lakes Region**

82. In Nairobi in January 2019, the Special Representative gave a presentation on her mandate to the Technical Support Committee of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. At that meeting, the signatory States to the Framework committed themselves to remain engaged with her Office, including with regard to the regional and subregional prevention initiatives encouraged in Security Council resolution 2427 (2018). Her Office is planning a workshop in 2020 with signatory States, in cooperation with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to discuss regional prevention initiatives to better protect conflict-affected children.

### **League of Arab States**

83. In Cairo on 28 and 29 July 2019, the Office of the Special Representative participated in the Third Regional Conference on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, co-hosted by the League of Arab States and OHCHR. In September 2019, the Special Representative and the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs of the League of Arab States met in New York to discuss how to enhance the implementation of the cooperation framework they had signed in 2014.

### **Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel**

84. The Special Representative, including during her meeting in Mali in July 2019 with the Deputy Force Commander of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, advocated for the mainstreaming of child protection provisions in the international humanitarian law and human rights compliance framework of the Joint Force. The Office of the Special Representative contributed to the development of training modules on child protection for Joint Force officers and troops.

## **G. Working with United Nations mechanisms**

85. The Special Representative continued her cooperation and engagement with other United Nations system entities, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Her Office contributed to the revised Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards on the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups. Her Office also contributed to a training on child protection developed by the Department of Peace Operations and to the Occasional Policy Paper of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs entitled “Building a culture of protection: 20 years of Security Council engagement on the protection of civilians”, published in May 2019.

86. The Office of the Special Representative increased its engagement with the World Health Organization, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and UNESCO regarding their participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism. The Office closely cooperated with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, particularly regarding trafficking as it relates to children affected by armed conflict and the protection of children affected by violent extremism.

87. The Special Representative strengthened her outreach with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Responsibility to Protect. On 12 June 2019, she issued a joint statement with the Special Advisers regarding attacks against civilians in central Mali. On 19 June 2019, the Special Representative, with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Argentina, co-hosted an event on the importance of a survivor-centred approach. In September 2019, technical teams from both Offices travelled to Myanmar to undertake a joint training for partners on child protection and conflict-related sexual violence.

88. The Special Representative also continued her cooperation with the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth to ensure that the voice of conflict-affected children was heard and that they were able to fully realize their potential as agents of change for peace. In April 2019, the Special Representative participated in the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum and spoke during the interactive dialogue on the theme “youth, peace and security: challenges and prospects”.

## **H. Working with civil society**

89. Non-governmental organizations are key partners for the work of the Special Representative, and deepening partnerships with civil society thus remained a priority throughout 2019.

90. In addition to regular interactions with New York-based non-governmental organizations, engagement by the Special Representative with Europe-based non-governmental organizations, including in Berlin, Brussels, Geneva and London, was facilitated by the opening of the Special Representative’s Liaison Office in Brussels. The Special Representative also met with civil society partners during her field missions, including in the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia.

91. The Special Representative participated in dozens of events organized by civil society, and dozens more were attended by representatives from her Office. In the margins of the fortieth session of the Human Rights Council, held in Geneva in March 2019, the Special Representative spoke at a side event organized by the Education Above All Foundation entitled “Education 2030: leaving no one behind – children with disabilities, girls, forcibly displaced children and minorities”. She was also a panellist at an event entitled “The Safe Schools Declaration: better protecting women and girls from attacks on education”, organized by Argentina, Mali, Norway, Romania, Spain, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. She further participated in an event on children and counter-terrorism organized by the European Union, Switzerland, Human Rights Watch, Defence for Children International and the non-governmental organization panel for the global study on children deprived of liberty.

92. The centennial anniversary of Save the Children, marked in May 2019 in the Hague, Netherlands, was another opportunity for the Special Representative to emphasize the voice of partners and support the global symposium on the theme “Stop the war on children”.

93. In Berlin in June 2019, the Special Representative participated alongside the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development in an event organized by World Vision Germany on the need for sustainable and dedicated reintegration funding for children formerly associated with parties to conflict.

94. In September 2019, the Special Representative was a guest speaker at the event entitled “How are we going to stop the war on children?”, organized by Save the Children in New York during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly. At the same occasion, and as part of her efforts to support the reintegration of former child soldiers, she took part in the event entitled “A goal within reach: ending the institutionalization of children to ensure no one is left behind”, organized by the Lumos Foundation.

95. At the event entitled “Responding to sexual violence in the context of detention”, organized in October 2019 by the All Survivors Project, the Special Representative shed light on the issue of sexual violence against boys in conflict.

96. Discussions on children and armed conflict with universities, academics and think tanks continued throughout 2019. During her missions to Brussels in April 2019 and to Berlin in June 2019, she met with the European Institute of Peace and with the Center for International Peace Operations, respectively, and discussed avenues for cooperation. In November 2019, she was invited as a keynote speaker to the First Congress of the International Mukwege Chair on violence against women and girls in conflict, organized at the University of Liège with the Queen of Belgium and Dr. Mukwege.

97. The Special Representative also provided video messages in support of partners, for instance for an event organized for Red Hand Day on 12 February 2019 by Terre des hommes Germany.

98. Representatives from the Office of the Special Representative also participated in events, attending for instance in Geneva in October 2019 the annual meeting of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. The same month, her Office took part in a side event in Amsterdam with conflict-affected youth, organized by War Child Holland in the margins of the International Conference on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support.

## VI. Conclusions and recommendations

99. **The Special Representative remains deeply concerned about the scale and severity of grave violations committed against children and calls upon the Human Rights Council and States Members of the United Nations to take all available measures to prevent violations from occurring. The Special Representative especially expresses concern with regard to the dehumanization of civilian populations, including children, and urges all parties to turn obligations contained in historic conventions and declarations into a reality. She calls upon parties to conflict to remove all impediments to humanitarian access to children and to enable unimpeded access to education for conflict-affected children by better protecting schools, school children and teachers, and implementing concrete measures to deter the military use of schools.**

100. **The Special Representative calls anew upon Member States to treat children allegedly associated with armed groups, including Security Council designated terrorist groups, primarily as victims, prioritize their rehabilitation and reintegration, and address the especially detrimental impact of stigma on their reintegration. She further reminds Member States that, if a child is accused of a crime during his or her association, juvenile justice standards and standards of fair trial must be applied. The Special Representative calls upon the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies and the relevant special procedure mandate holders to focus closely on the impact of violent extremism on children, including the issue of children of or recruited as foreign fighters.**

101. **The Special Representative welcomes national and international efforts to achieve accountability for perpetrators of grave violations against children. Member States and the donor community are encouraged to strengthen their support to national justice systems in conflict and post-conflict situations by providing sufficient resources and technical capacity for investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of grave violations against children.**

102. The Special Representative reminds Member States and regional and subregional organizations that the sustainable reintegration of children is crucial to ensure sustainable peace and security and to break cycles of violence. The Special Representative calls upon them and on other reintegration actors to provide sustainable political, technical and financial support for such efforts, and calls upon all of them to join the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers.

103. The Special Representative welcomes recent ratifications of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and urges Member States that have not done so to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol, and to enact national legislation and policies to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups. She also calls upon Member States to endorse instruments improving the protection of conflict-affected children, such as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

104. The Special Representative encourages the Human Rights Council to maintain the practice of including recommendations on the protection of children affected by armed conflict when considering or adopting resolutions on country-specific situations or thematic issues, and in the universal periodic review process, with particular attention paid to the implementation of such recommendations. The Special Representative also encourages the Human Rights Council to continue to include child rights violations in its resolutions establishing or renewing the relevant mandates of special procedures.

105. The Special Representative welcomes the continued attention paid to the impact of armed conflict on children in States parties' reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee. In that regard, all relevant Member States are urged to include, as appropriate, specific references to information on grave violations against children, on gaps in their applicable legal and policy frameworks and on accountability initiatives in their submissions to those bodies. She encourages the relevant United Nations entities to use the recommendations of those bodies as advocacy tools with the Member States concerned.

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