



Security Council

Distr.: General
27 August 2021

Original: English

Children and armed conflict in Yemen

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, the third on the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen, has been prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#). It contains information on the six grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in Yemen in the period from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020, with details on perpetrators and the context in which the violations were committed, when available. It also contains information on the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through the implementation of action plans.

Lastly, the report provides recommendations to end and prevent grave violations against children in Yemen and improve their protection.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, which covers the period from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020, has been submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict. It is the third report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict in Yemen. It documents trends and patterns of grave violations against children since the previous report ([S/2019/453](#)) and the adoption by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen ([S/AC.51/2020/1](#)). It also outlines challenges and progress in addressing grave violations and contains specific recommendations to strengthen the protection of children. Where possible, the report identifies parties to conflict responsible for grave violations against children. In that regard, the government forces of Yemen, including the Yemeni armed forces, were listed for the recruitment and use of children under section B of annex I to the most recent report on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)) as a party that had put in place measures aimed at improving the protection of children. The Houthis (who refer to themselves Ansar Allah) were listed for recruitment and use under section B, while also being listed under section A as a party that have not put in place measures to improve the protection of children, for killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, pro-government militias, including the Salafists and popular committees,¹ and the Security Belt Forces were listed under section A.

2. The United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting continued to face significant challenges in monitoring and reporting grave violations against children in over 49 active frontline locations, including the governorates of Ma'rib, Hajjah, Sa'dah, Ta'izz and Hudaydah. It was often difficult to verify information owing to lack of access, security risks, fear, intimidation and threats, and related risks of being arrested and subjected to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. In some instances, staff of the member organizations of the country task force were detained by the Houthis and prevented from accessing key locations to collect information related to children associated with armed forces and groups.

3. From March 2020 onward, the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and related restrictions further exacerbated existing challenges. Therefore, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed in Yemen during the reporting period, and the actual number of grave violations is likely to be much higher.

II. Overview of political and security developments

4. Conflict has continued unabated across Yemen since the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Yemen ([S/2019/453](#)). Fighting intensified on some fronts, particularly in the governorates of Jawf, Ma'rib, Sana'a (Nihm District), Ta'izz, Hudaydah, Bayda', Abyan and Sa'dah. The territorial control exercised by various parties to the conflict continued to adjust during the reporting period. For that reason, the Yemeni armed forces continued to be deployed in various locations across Yemen, including in the northern part of the country. For example, the Yemeni armed forces were present in certain areas of Sa'dah Governorate on the border with Saudi Arabia and in parts of Hudaydah, Ma'rib, and Hajjah Governorates. The Houthis consolidated their territorial control over the northwest of the country, including over the capital, Sana'a, and expanded eastward into areas in Ma'rib, while

¹ The pro-government tribal militias known as the popular committees have since renamed themselves Popular Resistance.

control over parts of Ta'izz and Hudaydah remain contested. Meanwhile, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula continued to operate in Bayda', Abyan, Lahij, and Hadramawt Governorates, as well as in Ta'izz Governorate, where areas controlled by Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula remained inaccessible for monitoring purposes. Much like Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, Islamic State in Yemen has been mostly active in the country's southern and central governorates, in particular Bayda', Abyan and Aden.

5. In December 2018, the Government of Yemen and the Houthis reached what is known as the Stockholm Agreement, which covers the city of Hudaydah and the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Issa, as well as comprising an executive mechanism on activating the prisoner exchange agreement and a statement of understanding on Ta'izz. The Agreement resulted in a significant reduction in the number of civilian deaths and injuries in Hudaydah Governorate. However, fighting persisted along longstanding frontlines, at times in close proximity to built-up residential areas. Frontlines near the city of Ta'izz also remained active, with shelling, armed clashes and attacks with improvised explosive devices despite the presence of civilian populations in those areas.

6. The country's border with Saudi Arabia was the scene of frequent unrest, mostly in the form of cross-border shelling, sporadic ground clashes and air strikes. Tensions spiked in the second quarter of 2019, but then receded by the end of 2019. The Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen resumed air strikes and the Houthis resumed cross-border attacks after an escalation of violence in Sana'a, Jawf and Ma'rib in early 2020. Incidents resulting in child casualties were verified, with Hudaydah, Sa'dah and Hajjah being the governorates suffering the most severe impact. Upticks in air strikes in 2020 were often a response to Houthi cross-border attacks fired into Saudi Arabia.

7. On 25 March 2020, the Secretary-General made an urgent appeal to the parties in Yemen to end hostilities, reach a negotiated political settlement and work to counter the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of Yemen and the Houthis welcomed the appeal, but hostilities continued. On 9 April 2020, the Coalition announced a two-week unilateral ceasefire to create an environment conducive to peace efforts led by the United Nations.

8. Southern parts of Yemen, in particular Aden, Abyan and Shabwah Governorates, were the scene of high levels of insecurity and civil unrest. In August 2019, heavy clashes occurred in Aden between the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council, which resulted in the Southern Transitional Council gaining control of key military installations and government buildings. Saudi mediation resulted in a ceasefire, and in November 2019, the Government and the Southern Transitional Council signed the Riyadh Agreement to end the instability in southern Yemen. Implementation of the Agreement was, however, limited and, on 25 April 2020, the Southern Transitional Council unilaterally declared itself a self-administration, before rescinding that declaration on 28 July 2020. Despite a fragile truce, hostilities have continued intermittently.

9. In October 2020, following months of negotiations facilitated by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as part of the Stockholm Agreement, the parties exchanged 1,056 prisoners. Also, in December 2020, the airport of Aden came under missile attack. The attack was targeted at an arriving plane carrying the newly formed cabinet of Yemen and resulted in the death of 17 people, including three ICRC staff members. At the time, there were 49 active frontlines across the country, the highest number ever witnessed. The result was an increase in the number of grave violations against children and a stark humanitarian impact on an already vulnerable conflict-affected population.

III. Grave violations against children

10. During the reporting period (the calendar years 2019 and 2020), the country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 8,526 grave violations against 3,503 children (2,698 boys, 805 girls). Seventy of those children were victims of multiple violations. Compared with the previous report (S/2019/453), the number of grave violations per year has significantly increased. Within the current reporting period, the number of grave violations significantly increased from 4,105 violations affecting 2,162 children in 2019 to 4,421 violations affecting 1,341 children in 2020. Denial of humanitarian access was the most verified violation (4,881 instances), followed by killing and maiming (2,612) and recruitment and use (861).

11. The majority of grave violations (5,304 or 62 per cent) were attributed to the Houthis, while the Yemeni armed forces were responsible for 1,022 violations (12 per cent) and the Coalition for 627 violations (7 per cent). In addition, and this is noteworthy, at least 600 children were affected by crossfire between conflicting parties. Amanat al-Asimah was the governorate with the highest number of grave violations (1,491), followed by Hudaydah (1,263), Sa'dah (974), Ta'izz (677), Hajjah (671) and others (3,450).

12. The monitoring and verification of grave violations against children by the country task force continued to be severely constrained by security and access restrictions, including threats against and the detention of monitors, which posed significant challenges to the effective documentation and reporting of grave violations. The intensity of the conflict and hostilities also hindered the verification of violations.

13. The first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Yemen on 10 April 2020, and movement restrictions for United Nations personnel were enforced to prevent the spread of the virus. While such preventative measures slowed down monitoring and reporting activities, the country task force was able to continue most of its activities.

A. Recruitment and use

14. The United Nations verified that a total of 861 children (789 boys, 72 girls) aged between 10 and 17 years were recruited and used in 2019 (698) and in 2020 (163). There was a decline in the number of children recruited and used in comparison to the two preceding years (896 in 2017 and 370 in 2018), but it should be noted that, during that same period, the country task force faced increasing access and security restrictions and communities were in greater fear to report violations due to risks of retaliation. Cases were attributed to the Houthis (605), Yemeni armed forces (171), Security Belt Forces (52), Shabwani Elite Forces (14), unidentified perpetrators (12), Popular Resistance (4), Salafists (2), and Hiraq Southern Movement (1). Most children were recruited and used in Hajjah Governorate (263), followed by the governorates of Sa'dah (82), Dhamar (62), Ta'izz (58) and Shabwah (50), among others.

15. Two-thirds of the children (606) were recruited and subsequently trained, armed and used in active combat, of whom 115 (19 per cent) were between 10 and 15 years old. The remaining children were assigned to guard military checkpoints and place or clear mines, and were used in other roles, including as guards, porters and cooks. All 72 girls were recruited by the Houthis and used as spies, to carry out intelligence gathering in their communities, or to persuade male family members to become combatants.

16. The Houthis mainly recruited and used children in Hajjah Governorate (260), followed by the governorates of Sa'dah (75) and Dhamar (61). Information gathered indicated that children were often enrolled through cultural and ideological

programmes, which could last for several weeks. The children were then often sent to military training camps to learn how to use weapons, before being sent out to fight. For example, in one incident, the Houthis recruited a 15-year-old boy in March 2020 in Dhamar Governorate after he had attended a cultural and religious event at a Houthi office located in his village. When the boy's family found out, they went to the Houthi supervisor to ask for their son back but were threatened with imprisonment. The boy participated in fighting in several frontlines in Sana'a, Sa'dah and Bayda' Governorates.

17. Recruitment and use of children by the Yemeni armed forces mainly took place in the governorates of Shabwah (36), Ma'rib (20) Dali' (19), Ta'izz (17) and Bayda' (15). For example, the Yemeni armed forces recruited one 14-year-old boy in April 2020 in Bayda' Governorate and transferred him to a military camp in Abyan Governorate, where he received a monthly salary between 60,000 and 80,000 Yemeni rial (approximately \$130). The boy participated in hostilities. When not fighting, the boy was used to guard the gates of the camp.

18. The Security Belt Forces mainly recruited and used children from the governorates of Abyan (24), Lahij (15) and Dali' (10). For example, the Security Belt Forces recruited one 10-year-old boy in January 2020 in Abyan Governorate and took him in a military vehicle to participate in fighting against the Houthis in Hudaydah Governorate.

19. Poverty, unemployment and limited access to education, vocational training and livelihood opportunities remained key drivers of child recruitment in Yemen. Children joined parties to the conflict to provide financial support to their families. In many cases, that was the only source of income for the family. Social factors also influenced behaviours: for example, the affiliation of peers or relatives with an armed group contributed to recruitment. Religious beliefs and political ideologies were less perceived as drivers for recruitment during the reporting period, but they did play a role in encouraging some children to join the ranks of parties. In certain cases, children had been recruited with the agreement of the family, but there were also verified cases of forced recruitment. Children were often recruited in groups through collective mobilization campaigns.

20. Finally, the recruitment and use of children was frequently connected to other grave violations. Mines, explosive remnants of war, air strikes or gunshots killed or maimed many boys while they were being used in hostilities or while they were operating checkpoints or delivering supplies to fighters. For example, in July 2020 in Saqayn District, Sa'dah Governorate, the supervisor of a Houthi-run summer camp took three children to a military training camp in Ma'rib Governorate without the knowledge of their families. The boys were trained in the use of weapons, given military uniforms and assigned as guards of the camp. Three days later, the camp was targeted in an air strike in which the boys were killed. In another example, a 14-year-old boy recruited by Yemeni armed forces in Jawf Governorate in March 2018 had participated in fighting along several frontlines in Jawf Governorate since March 2020. In October 2020, the boy was killed by a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis targeting the frontline.

Deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with armed forces or armed groups

21. During the reporting period, 111 boys between the ages of 12 and 17 years were deprived of their liberty for their alleged association with opposing parties to conflict for periods ranging from six months to three years. A total of 97 cases of deprivation of liberty were verified in 2019, and 14 in 2020. The children were held by the Houthis (70), Yemeni armed forces (37), the Coalition (3) and the Security Belt Forces (1).

22. Of those, the Coalition captured 25 boys and handed them over to the Government of Yemen, which held them before releasing them to an interim care centre in Ma'rib in October 2019. The country task force facilitated their reunification with their families. In a separate development, the country task force was granted access to a detention facility in Sana'a in December 2019; it identified 68 boys captured by the Houthis during a military operation. All children were released in January 2020, transferred to an interim care centre and later reunified with their families.

B. Killing and maiming

23. The country task force verified that a total of 2,612 children (1,889 boys, 723 girls) were killed (678) or maimed (1,934) during the reporting period. Of those children, 1,488 were killed or maimed (1,073 boys, 415 girls) in 2019 and 1,124 (816 boys, 308 girls) in 2020. Those figures represent a slight reduction compared with the preceding two years (1,354 in 2017 and 1,689 in 2018). It should be noted that while conflict escalated during the reporting period, several new frontlines were not accessible to the country task force. It is therefore possible that the reduction was also linked to a lack of access and underreporting.

24. Child casualties were attributed to Houthis (548), followed by the Coalition (436), the Yemeni armed forces (217), Security Belt Forces (60), Popular Resistance (48), Islamic State (13) and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (7). The remaining 1,283 child casualties were attributed to unidentified perpetrators; 545 child casualties resulted from crossfire between various parties and 738 were the result of either attacks against civilians by unidentified combatants (272) or explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices (466). The majority of casualties were verified in the governorates of Hudaydah (602) and Ta'izz (523), representing 43 per cent of the total number of children killed or maimed. A further 343 child casualties occurred in Dali' Governorate, 206 in Jawf Governorate, 166 in Sa'dah Governorate, 144 in Ma'rib Governorate, 136 in Bayda' Governorate and 126 in Hajjah Governorate. Overall, child casualties were verified in 19 of the 22 governorates in Yemen.

25. Mortar and artillery shelling, often in built-up residential areas, caused the largest amount of child casualties, affecting 831 children (32 per cent). These incidents largely occurred in the governorates of Hudaydah (277), Ta'izz (192) and Dali' (145). For example, on 31 May 2020, three shells attributed to the Houthis hit a residential neighbourhood in Harat al-Hali District, Hudaydah Governorate, around 1 kilometre from an active frontline. As a result of the shelling, shrapnel flew through the walls and doors of houses, killing of two children and maiming another 16.

26. Ground fighting, some of which involved sniper fire and the firing of small arms, was the second main cause of child casualties, affecting 631 children (24 per cent). Similar to mortar and artillery shelling, incidents related to ground fighting were also prevalent mainly in the governorates of Ta'izz (173), Hudaydah (171) and Dali' (87) and mainly occurred along active frontlines.

27. Mines and explosive remnants of war continued to kill and maim children and were the third highest cause of child casualties (545) in the reporting period (21 per cent). Most could not be attributed to a specific perpetrator, but there are reports of widespread use of landmines by armed groups.² The use of such means was most prevalent in the following governorates: Hudaydah (92), Bayda' (81), Ta'izz (77), Jawf (60) and Ma'rib (48). The intensification of the conflict around existing and emerging frontlines caused large-scale displacement of the Yemen population, exposing communities to increased risks of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

² S/2021/79; S/2020/70.

For example, in one incident on 16 April 2019, a landmine exploded in Hazm District, Jawf Governorate affecting five boys who were playing in the area, killing (2) and maiming (3) them. Another incident occurred on 7 August 2020 when a cluster bomb exploded in Harib al-Qaramish District, Ma'rib Governorate. Children had found the cluster bomb and, without knowing what it was, threw it onto a fire. Two children were killed and two were maimed as a result of the explosion.

28. A further 355 child casualties were the result of air strikes and other aerial attacks (14 per cent), a significant reduction from the preceding two years, 2017 and 2018 (1,477). The majority of those casualties were the result of air strikes and other aerial attacks attributed to the Coalition (341). The remaining 14 could not be attributed to a specific party. All took place across the northern governorates, mainly in Jawf (91), Hajjah (79), Sa'dah (56), Dali' (31) and Amanat al-Asimah (21). The deadliest airstrike took place on 15 February 2020 in Maslub District, Jawf Governorate, when a Coalition airstrike hit civilian houses, resulting in the killing (26) and maiming (18) of 44 children.

29. Finally, there was an increasing trend of military vehicles running over children or crashing with civilian vehicles during the reporting period, which led to 121 child casualties (5 per cent), mainly occurring in areas under the control of the Government and the Security Belt Forces in the following governorates: Abyan (21), Ta'izz (21), Aden (20) and Lahij (18). For example, on 30 August 2020, three boys were riding on a motorbike in Khanfar District, Abyan Governorate, when a speeding military vehicle belonging to the Security Belt Forces hit them. They were immediately taken to the nearest hospital for treatment, but all subsequently died.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

30. The country task force verified 14 incidents of sexual violence affecting seven girls and seven boys between the ages of 6 and 16 years; 4 of those incidents were verified in 2019 and 10 in 2020. The number was similar to that for the preceding two years, 2017 and 2018 (14). However, the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher, as rape and other forms of sexual violence against children continued to be greatly underreported owing to fear of stigmatization, cultural norms, lack of awareness, fear of reprisals, and lack of adequate support services or avenues for accountability.

31. The verified cases were attributed to the Houthis (10), the Yemeni armed forces (2), Security Belt Forces (1) and Salafists (1). Some of the child survivors of sexual violence reported having been raped multiple times and had been subjected to threats if they reported what had happened to them and sought support. Those were verified in the governorates of Ta'izz (5), Hajjah (3), Aden (1), Bayda' (1), Hudaydah (1), Amanat al-Asimah (1), Amran (1) and Sana'a (1).

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

32. A total of 72 attacks on schools (37) and hospitals (35), including on protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals,³ were verified during the reporting period: 36 attacks (21 schools; 15 hospitals) occurred in 2019 and another 36

³ For the purposes of the present report, the phrase "protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals", used in Security Council resolutions 1998 (2011), 2143 (2014) and 2147 (2018), as well as in the statements by the President of the Security Council of 17 June 2013 (S/PRST/2013/8) and 31 October 2017 (S/PRST/2017/21), refers to teachers, other educational personnel, students, doctors and patients.

(16 schools and 20 hospitals) in 2020. The trend remained at similar level compared with the two previous years (36 in 2017; 44 in 2018). Schools and hospitals were attacked, destroyed, looted and education and health personnel, as well as students and patients, were threatened, intimidated, detained or killed.

Attacks on schools and protected persons in relation to schools

33. A total of 37 attacks on schools were verified in the governorates of Dali' (10), Ta'izz (8), Raymah (6), Ma'rib (3), Shabwah (3), Hajjah (2), Bayda' (1), Hudaydah (1), Jawf (1), Mahwit (1) and Sa'dah (1). The majority of the incidents were attacks attributed to the Houthis (25), followed by the Coalition (4), the Yemeni armed forces (3) and unidentified combatants (3), or resulted from crossfire between the Houthis and the Yemeni armed forces (1) and between Popular Resistance and the Yemeni armed forces (1).

34. The incidents suspended the education of thousands of children and caused panic among communities. Many schools were the targets of heavy shelling, some on multiple occasions, and had their facilities and classrooms damaged. Some schools were razed. For example, in September 2020, the Houthis shelled an elementary school in Salah District, Ta'izz Governorate, multiple times, damaging five classrooms. It is noteworthy that elements of the Yemeni armed forces had occupied the school since April 2020. In other incidents schools were destroyed by air strikes, landmines planted inside school buildings and the Houthis opening fire at school buildings.

35. Furthermore, teachers have been intimidated, threatened with accusations of treason, and detained by parties to conflict. In one incident, in October 2019, soldiers of the Yemeni armed forces intimidated the teachers of a primary school in Mayfa'ah District, Shabwah Governorate, which resulted in the students fleeing the school and returning home. The soldiers deployed in the school and raised the flag of Yemen on top of the building.

Military use of schools

36. The country task force verified that 80 schools had been used for military purposes, including 46 in 2019 and 34 in 2020. Most incidents were attributed to the Houthis (70), followed by the Yemeni armed forces (5), unidentified combatants (4) and Popular Resistance (1). Incidents were most prevalent in northern governorates under the control of the Houthis, including Mahwit (23), Raymah (20) and Sa'dah (20).

37. There were many incidents in which the Houthis used schools to disseminate propaganda and carry out recruitment drives. In January 2020, for example, in Sahar District, Sa'dah Governorate, Houthi leaders held a political meeting inside a primary school, inviting local residents and students to attend and listen to speeches in which they solicited financial and human resources in support of their cause. A recruitment committee remained at the school for three days, causing parents to fear that the school might be targeted in air strikes. Consequently, students stopped attending classes.

38. The Houthis took advantage of school suspensions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and began to use schools as training and military barracks. Schools were used as sleeping quarters or offices for soldiers and storage for military equipment. In April 2019, a school in Mukha' District, Ta'izz Governorate, was used to store explosive material which subsequently exploded. Overall, the country task force verified eight incidents in which schools were used for military purposes and then damaged, which led to the partial or complete destruction of the facilities.

Attacks on hospitals and protected persons in relation to hospitals

39. The country task force verified 35 attacks on hospitals, 20 of which occurred in Ta'izz Governorate, while the remaining 15 took place in the governorates of Dali' (5), Hadramawt (3), Raymah (2), Ma'rib (2), Abyan (1), Lahij (1) and Shabwah (1). The incidents were attacks attributed to the Houthis (15), the Yemeni armed forces (10), Security Belt Forces (3), Popular Resistance (2), unidentified combatants (2), the Coalition (1) and Shabwah Elite Forces (1), or were the result of crossfire between the Yemeni armed forces and Popular Resistance (1).

40. The majority of the attacks came in the form of mortar and artillery shelling destroying hospital buildings and medical equipment, and injuring patients and staff, which led to the suspension of medical services. There were also several incidents that involved the looting of essential medical supplies. For example, in October 2020, Al-Amal hospital and cancer treatment centre in Qahirah District, Ta'izz Governorate, was targeted with anti-aircraft weapons attributed to the Houthis. Two of the hospital staff were injured in the attack, as well as one 14-year-old boy who was playing outside the hospital.

41. In other incidents, doctors and medical staff were assaulted, detained and threatened. For example, in April 2020, the Yemeni armed forces assaulted medical personnel in Taiseer medical compound, in the city of Shihr in Hadramawt Governorate. A military vehicle drove into the health compound carrying combatants of the Yemeni armed forces who proceeded to beat a male nurse and assaulted the finance manager, breaking his arm. The Yemeni armed forces then surrounded the compound and blocked the entrances, holding 18 staff inside for two days. In another incident, the Houthis stormed the Wahda hospital in Salah District, Ta'izz Governorate, detaining the assistant director for two hours.

42. Some hospitals were attacked several times throughout and before the reporting period. For example, Thawrah hospital in Salah District, Ta'izz Governorate, which had been attacked on multiple occasions in 2015 by both the Yemeni armed forces and the Houthis, was subjected to further attacks in August 2019, December 2019 and June 2020.

Military use of hospitals

43. Although much less prevalent than the military use of schools, the country task force verified the use of four hospitals for military purposes by the Houthis (2) and the Yemeni armed forces (2) in the governorates of Dali' (2), Ma'rib (1) and Ta'izz (1). For example, in March 2020 in Salah District, Ta'izz Governorate, the Yemeni armed forces ordered the director of a health centre to vacate the premises so that they could use it as military barracks. As a result, staff were unable to treat any patients for three days and had to use the director's house until another building was ready to operate one week after the evacuation of the previous building.

E. Abduction

44. The country task force verified the abduction of 86 children (83 boys, 3 girls), some as young as 10 years old. Of these children, 31 were abducted in 2019 and 55 in 2020 by the Houthis (46), the Yemeni armed forces (31), Security Belt Forces (4), Hadrami Elite Forces (3), Popular Resistance (1) and the Yemeni Islah Party (1). The abductions were verified mainly in the governorates of Shabwah (23), Hajjah (11), Sa'dah (9) and Jawf (8).

45. Abduction was primarily used for recruiting children. For example, in February 2019 a 16-year-old boy was abducted from Aflah al-Yaman District, Hajjah

Governorate, and subsequently recruited by the Houthis, who took him to a military camp for three months to undergo training. After the training, the boy was deployed to frontline locations for four months, where the Yemeni armed forces captured him in October 2019. In November 2019, he was handed over to the Coalition, which transferred him to a government-run interim care centre in Ma'rib. In another incident, in May 2020, the Houthis abducted a 16-year-old boy in Sahar District, Sa'dah Governorate. The boy was taken under the pretext of being used to smuggle khat into Saudi Arabia, as his father was known in the community to be a smuggler. However, he was sent to a military training camp instead, after which he was sent to Jawf Governorate to participate in hostilities without his family's knowledge. In June 2020, he was killed in an airstrike that was targeted at the military vehicle in which he was travelling.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

46. The country task force verified 4,881 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, which made it the most prevalent violation during the period under review. Of those, 1,848 denials were verified in 2019, and 3,033 in 2020. While that significant increase could partly be the result of capacity-building initiatives to reinforce the monitoring of the violation, it also signified a severe deterioration in the operating environment for humanitarian actors in Yemen.

47. Altogether 83 per cent of the incidents of denials were attributed to the Houthis (4,055), followed by the Yemeni armed forces (588), the Coalition (186) and unidentified perpetrators (52). Most denials occurred in the governorate of Amanat al-Asimah (1,426), followed by the governorates of Sa'dah (716), Hudaydah (649), Ibb (319) and Hajjah (266).

48. Among these incidents, 60 per cent involved restrictions of movement within the country (2,934). In northern Yemen, this was mainly due to the Houthis imposing restrictive regulations, combined with unpredictable blockages in which the delivery of assistance and services, as well as routine travel, were regularly obstructed. Towards the end of 2020, there was a rise in the number of reports of delays and hold-ups of humanitarian personnel at checkpoints whenever female staff were found to be travelling without a *mahram* (male guardian), particularly in Hajjah and Hudaydah Governorates. The country task force also verified reports that in southern Yemen, at times, payment was being demanded at road checkpoints to allow passage. Such demands were declined by the humanitarian agencies affected.

49. Interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities was the second most common type of denial of humanitarian access. There were 1,345 incidents (28 per cent), which included interference in local beneficiary registration, obstruction of humanitarian assessments and attempts to divert aid. There were additional reports of delays and denials of implementation of subagreements on projects of non-governmental organizations, as well as associated attempts to influence the content of projects.

50. Violence affecting humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities was the third most common type of denial of humanitarian access, with 450 incidents (9 per cent). Among the most emblematic incidents were the killing, assault, arbitrary detention, arrest, harassment, threatening and intimidation of humanitarian personnel. For example, three ICRC staff members were killed in the attack on Aden airport on 30 December 2020 which was targeted at an arriving plane carrying the new Government of Yemen. In addition, there were incidents of confiscation, looting, theft and attacks on humanitarian supplies and assets, and armed occupation of humanitarian premises.

51. A further 152 incidents (3 per cent) were related to movement restrictions imposed on humanitarian organizations, personnel or goods being brought into Yemen. These involved various restrictions, including denials and delays imposed on the importation of life-saving humanitarian supplies and operational assets into the country.

IV. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children

A. Dialogue with the Government of Yemen

52. The Government of Yemen remained committed to protecting children affected by armed conflict, including through its action plan signed in 2014 to end and prevent child recruitment and use and the related road map adopted in December 2018 to expedite implementation of the action plan. In the first half of 2019, the Ministry of Defence appointed 90 child protection focal points within the Yemeni Armed Forces. Forty of those focal points were given training on the identification and documentation of children associated with armed forces and groups in August 2019 in Aden. A second training event, which had been scheduled for the remaining focal points in 2019, had to be suspended because of the deteriorating security situation in Aden. Further efforts to implement the action plan and the road map were hampered by the tensions that unfolded in southern Yemen between the Southern Transitional Council and the Government of Yemen as from August 2019. This created delays in implementation that were compounded by the absence from Aden of key senior government officials during most of the reporting period.

53. Nevertheless, in February 2020, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior issued political and military directives to prohibit child recruitment, which were further disseminated, with the support of the country task force. In March 2020, the President of Yemen issued a directive to prevent the recruitment and use of children in the armed and security forces, in which he instructed, inter alia, the establishment of child protection units in the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior. In August 2020, the joint technical committee tasked with overseeing the implementation of the action plan and road map, was able to reconvene in Aden and resume its activities. In its first meeting, the committee recommended the reactivation of its meetings and requested that the country task force continue to provide technical support and assistance. By late 2020, the newly appointed Government in Aden expressed a renewed commitment vis-à-vis the road map and action plan. In that context, the resumption of training of the child protection focal points in the Yemeni armed forces was agreed for 2021.

54. The country task force negotiated the release of 52 children held in a security facility in Ma'rib for their alleged association with the Houthis. The Coalition encountered the children during military operations and handed them over to the Government of Yemen. They were placed in an interim care centre in Ma'rib.

B. Dialogue with the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen

55. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict continued her engagement with the Coalition under the memorandum of understanding signed in March 2019 to strengthen the protection of children in Yemen and the programme of time-bound activities endorsed in January 2020 in an exchange of letters. The agreed activities have been implemented since then and the Coalition has been submitting quarterly progress reports to the Special Representative. In addition, the Office of the Special Representative, the Special Representative

personally, Coalition representatives and the countries that are members of the Coalition have been holding regular meetings to review and discuss the programme's status of implementation and agree on priority activities.

56. In June 2020, the Coalition was delisted from the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)) for the violation of killing and maiming, following a sustained significant decrease in killing and maiming in air strikes and the signing and implementation of the programme of time-bound activities to support the implementation of the memorandum of understanding. The delisting was conditional on the continued further decrease and full implementation of all aspects of the memorandum of understanding between the United Nations and the Coalition.

C. Dialogue with the Houthis

57. A dialogue focused on child protection was formalized in July 2019, with the Houthis appointing a senior-level focal point to lead the discussions on developing a joint action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children. A joint technical committee was established to support the dialogue. The committee included 20 representatives of the group's various components. Negotiations about a draft action plan have been ongoing since September 2019. In addition, a protocol for the handover of children captured during military operations was signed in April 2020. That was followed by the training of 30 officers and 19 members of the joint technical committee on key international legal frameworks and aspects of the protection of children in armed conflict. The developments made it possible to secure the release of 68 children encountered in military operations and held for their alleged association with the Yemeni armed forces. They were taken to a newly established interim care centre in Sana'a, and the country task force was able to reunite the children with their families.

D. Other advocacy initiatives

58. In 2020, a group of friends of children and armed conflict was formed for Yemen with the objective of gathering key actors in the community of Member States in support of advocacy among parties to conflict. The first formal meeting, chaired by Switzerland and the European Union, was held on 7 October 2020.

V. Observations and recommendations

59. I am dismayed by the increase and scale of grave violations committed against children by all parties to the conflict in Yemen, as outlined in the present report. The prolonged conflict across the country, compounded by a multiplication of active frontlines and armed actors, has resulted in worrying and ongoing patterns of violations over the years, which have caused enormous suffering for children, their families and communities. I condemn these grave violations against children and urge all parties to abide by their obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

60. I am troubled by the significant increase in incidents of denial of humanitarian access in Yemen during the reporting period, which is the most prevalent grave violation. This has affected millions of children and other conflict-affected communities in their access to life-saving assistance. I urge all parties to the conflict to facilitate safe, rapid and unhindered access for commercial imports, and humanitarian supplies and personnel, to all conflict-affected governorates. I further

call on all parties to take the necessary steps to remove restrictions on the movement of commercial and humanitarian goods into the country and their distribution throughout in order to reach the entire civilian population. I emphasize the importance of allowing the immediate access of children to health care and education services, nutrition and immunization assistance. I welcome the constructive efforts made by humanitarian agencies and donors working together to promote humanitarian access and principled aid delivery across Yemen during the reporting period. These efforts have led to several improvements and must continue.

61. I am extremely concerned at the persisting high numbers of children killed and maimed as a result of the conflict in Yemen, including by air strikes, shelling, often in residential areas, landmines and explosive remnants of war. I urge all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and better protect children, including in the conduct of military operations, to swiftly investigate incidents, and to refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

62. I am seriously concerned at the elevated number of children recruited and used. I urge all parties to stop and prevent child recruitment and use, and to immediately release from their ranks all children below the age of 18, without exception.

63. I am concerned that children continue to be deprived of liberty for their alleged association with opposing parties to the conflict and urge all parties to release from detention the children held on these grounds. I remind parties that children formerly associated with parties to conflict must be treated primarily as victims, and alternatives to detention should be pursued in accordance with their obligations under international law and in line with international standards, including the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, endorsed by Yemen. I urge all relevant parties to provide child protection actors with access to those children.

64. I am further concerned by the continuing attacks on schools and hospitals, including attacks and threats on protected persons in relation to schools and hospitals. I urge all relevant parties to immediately cease attacks and threats of attacks on medical and education facilities and protected persons, and to take the necessary measures to cease indiscriminate attacks against them. I call upon all parties to vacate the schools and hospitals used for military purposes and respect their civilian character in accordance with international humanitarian law. I call on relevant parties to ensure that children's access to health and education is not impeded by military operations.

65. I welcome the decrease in cases of child recruitment and use attributed to the Yemeni armed forces. I further welcome the continued commitment of the Government of Yemen to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict and abide by national and international law to end and prevent grave violations against children. I note the Government's efforts to adopt and put in place concrete measures to halt and prevent recruitment and use of children within the framework of its action plan signed with the United Nations in 2014 and the road map adopted in 2018 to expedite the action plan's implementation. I further take note of the political and military directives issued to prevent the recruitment of children, and the subsequent training of 40 military officers. I encourage the Government of Yemen to continue its constructive engagement with the United Nations to fully implement the activities agreed in the road map, including through the revitalization and reconstitution of the interministerial joint technical committee under the new cabinet.

66. Nevertheless, the noticeable increase in cases of killing and maiming of children attributed to government forces is worrying and I urge the Government of Yemen to put in place immediate measures to mitigate and reduce this trend.

67. I welcome the continued engagement of the Coalition with my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and its ongoing commitment to the memorandum of understanding signed with the Special Representative in March 2019 and to the workplan of time-bound activities endorsed in January 2020. I call upon the Coalition to continue strengthening its systems and policies to better protect children in the conduct of its activities and operations in Yemen and to institutionalize the prevention of grave violations. I urge the Coalition to continue to comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law. Although their numbers have decreased, I remain concerned by continuing incidents of air strikes resulting in child casualties, including those being investigated by the Coalition. I welcome the investigation by the Coalition of two incidents that took place in 2020 and I urge it to ensure that investigations are undertaken for all incidents with allegations of child casualties. I also urge the Coalition to expedite justice, accountability and redress to child victims and their families.

68. I welcome the signing by the Houthis of the handover protocol for children encountered during military operations in April 2020 and the release of the 68 children held in detention in Sana'a. I note the ongoing dialogue between the Houthis and the United Nations to put measures in place to protect children and to adopt an action plan to end and prevent grave violations against children. I urge the Houthis to promptly finalize and sign the action plan.

69. I encourage all parties to the conflict to collaborate with the country task force to develop standard operating procedures, which will guide the release of children from their ranks and their handover to civilian child protection actors. Particular attention must be given to the importance of the principles of neutrality, impartiality, do no harm, confidentiality and the protection of children from any retribution or stigmatization, across the entire spectrum of the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

70. I call upon all parties listed in the annexes to the report on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)) to engage with the United Nations so as to sign and implement action plans.

71. I appeal to the donor community to support the funding for child protection programmes, including for the reintegration and rehabilitation of children released from armed forces and groups, and for the monitoring and reporting of grave violations in Yemen.

72. Lastly, I call upon all parties to the conflict to declare a nationwide ceasefire and to continue their engagement with my Special Envoy for Yemen towards the resumption of an inclusive political process to reach a comprehensive negotiated political settlement with a view to ending the conflict and bringing lasting peace to Yemen. I also call upon them to include child protection concerns in the peace process and encourage the use of the *Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict* issued by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.
