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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 the present report, which covers the period from December 2022 to December 2023, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict explores challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children and in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict. She outlines the activities undertaken in discharging her mandate and the challenges faced and 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. She provides information on her field visits and her efforts to build partnerships, including with regional organizations and international partners. The Special Representative also outlines priorities and makes recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by conflict.



I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from December 2022 to December 2023 and is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/147, 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 the fulfilment of her mandate, including information on her field visits and on the progress achieved and the challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. The Special Representative also elaborates on her activities regarding the request of the 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. The report further highlights worrying trends observed by the Special Representative in the fulfilment of her mandate and provides analysis of areas of concern requiring further attention to better protect conflict-affected children.

II. Working with United Nations human rights mechanisms

2. To achieve universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Special Representative continued to advocate with States Members of the United Nations. In January 2023, Solomon Islands became the 173rd State party to the Optional Protocol.

3. Regular communication with the Human Rights Council regarding violations of the rights of conflict-affected children continued, with the Office of the Special Representative providing background information on children and armed conflict for thematic or country resolutions. In March 2023, the Special Representative presented her annual report to the Council.¹ The same month, she provided a video statement for the Council's high-level dialogue on technical assistance and capacity-building in the Central African Republic. Her Office continued to support the universal periodic review process by providing information on progress made and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children in countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. During the reporting period, the Office provided input for the universal periodic reviews of Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Nigeria and Yemen. Her Office also shared recommendations from the universal periodic review process pertaining to countries on the children and armed conflict agenda with the United Nations on the ground.

4. The Special Representative sustained her engagement with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council to exchange information and identify common areas of concern. Among the thematic mandate holders, she met with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences. The Special Representative also met with country mandate holders, including the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. Her Office provided input for relevant reports and country visits of special procedure mandate holders, including the report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on peacebuilding and the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the visit to Somalia of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia in November 2023. In March 2023, the Special Representative shared a video statement for the expert group meeting on conflict-related trafficking and accountability organized by the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Duke University School of Law International Human Rights Clinic and the International Development Law Organization. Also in March, the Special Representative intervened virtually at a side event on reparations for child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation organized by the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual

¹ [A/HRC/52/60](#).

abuse of children, Uruguay and the European Union. In June 2023, the Special Representative delivered a video statement for a side event on the prevention of trafficking in the context of international displacement, refugee protection and statelessness organized by the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Niger, Switzerland and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In October 2023, the Special Representative shared a video message for a side event entitled “Armed conflict and disability: from inclusive protection to peacebuilding” organized by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and eight other sponsors. Regarding exchanges with United Nations-mandated commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigations, the Office met with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.

5. The Committee on the Rights of the Child continued to raise the situation of children affected by armed conflict during the reviews of States parties’ implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Office of the Special Representative continued to cooperate with the Committee in that regard, including by providing input to the Committee’s country-specific concluding observations on Mali, and to work with the United Nations on the ground to support the implementation of recommendations pertaining to countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In February 2023, the Office provided feedback on the Committee’s draft general comment No. 26 (2023) on children’s rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change. In March and May 2023, the Special Representative met with the Chair of the Committee. In March 2023, the Special Representative, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Colombia, Japan, the Geneva-based Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, War Child UK, Save the Children International and Child Rights Connect, organized a side event in Geneva on strengthening the participation of children and accountability through a child rights approach to the implementation of the tools of the children and armed conflict mandate. The same month, the Special Representative issued a press release, together with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Special Representative on Violence against Children, stressing the need to ensure respect for child rights while countering terrorism and implementing national security measures. In October 2023, for the annual conference of the Geneva Human Rights Platform, the Special Representative provided a video statement for a panel discussion on enhancing cooperation between New York and Geneva for the protection of children in armed conflict, organized jointly by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Geneva Academy for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and Child Rights Connect. The Special Representative’s Europe Liaison Office in Brussels facilitated her engagement with the Geneva-based human rights mechanisms.

III. Challenges, progress and trends in the protection of conflict-affected children

A. Ending and preventing grave violations against children

6. During the reporting period, tens of thousands of children were affected by armed conflict across the globe and suffered abhorrent abuses and violations of their most basic rights. Children continued to be severely affected by protracted and multidimensional conflicts and chronic humanitarian crises. In some situations, relapse into or the escalation of conflict had devastating impacts on children and their communities. The splintering of existing or the emergence of new armed actors, intercommunal violence, the spreading of hostilities, the use of explosive weapons and the presence of explosive remnants of war contributed to high levels of grave violations against children. Challenges in access to conflict-affected areas hindered the monitoring of and reporting on grave violations and the provision of services to conflict-affected children.

7. The Special Representative, in cooperation with United Nations partners, engaged with parties to conflict and other relevant stakeholders in all situations covered by her mandate, including the two new situations of concern added in the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict,² namely, Haiti and the Niger.

8. In the Central African Republic, in March 2023, following United Nations engagement, a presidential decree was issued appointing, within the Ministry of National Defense and Reconstruction of the Army, focal points to liaise with various ministries, including the Ministry of Justice, the Promotion of Human Rights and Good Governance, on matters such as accountability and the handover of children formerly associated with armed groups to civilian authorities. Furthermore, a human rights focal point was appointed at the Headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic to address child protection concerns and accountability for grave violations committed by the armed forces.

9. In Colombia, the United Nations continued to engage with the Government, civil society organizations and the international community for the prevention of and response to grave violations against children. In April 2023, the Intersectoral commission for preventing the recruitment and exploitation of, and sexual violence against, children and adolescents by illegal armed groups and organized criminal groups resumed its work and issued a statement calling on armed groups to cease the recruitment and use of and sexual violence against children. In September 2023, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace opened case No. 11 on sexual and gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict. Some 35 per cent of victims were children at the time of the commission of these crimes.

10. In Ethiopia, following the Special Representative's visit to Addis Ababa in June 2023, the Government engaged with her in an exchange of letters and committed to the appointment of senior-level focal points on children and armed conflict in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs. Following the Special Representative's recommendations on measures to end and prevent grave violations against children in Ethiopia, the Government confirmed its commitment to continue to integrate specific child protection measures and protocols in demining activities, to strengthen efforts to ensure access to education and to cooperate closely with United Nations partners.

11. In Iraq, the Government and the United Nations signed, in March 2023, an action plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. The Popular Mobilization Forces have been delisted by the Secretary-General from the annexes to his latest annual report on children and armed conflict³ for the violation of recruitment and use of children owing to a decrease in this grave violation attributed to them and the signature of the action plan. The delisting is conditional upon the finalization of all pending action plan activities and the continued absence of recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces.

12. In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in December 2022, the Special Representative conducted a visit to continue her engagement with the Israeli authorities and Palestinian armed groups to adopt clear and time-bound commitments to end and prevent grave violations against children, in accordance with the request of the Secretary-General in his report on children and armed conflict published in June 2022,⁴ as well as with Palestinian authorities. Her visit concluded with an exchange of letters with Israel, the appointment of a focal point and the identification of practical measures. She discussed all grave violations against children with the parties and possible measures to urgently strengthen the protection of children in Israel, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Letters were also received from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a focal point was appointed and practical measures were identified. In 2023, the Special Representative issued public statements on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, expressing her concern over the grave situation affecting children and calling on all parties to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict and humanitarian access to children, and to release abducted children.

² [A/77/895-S/2023/363](#).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ [A/76/871-S/2022/493](#).

13. In Myanmar, the United Nations continued to reach out to engage in the context of the joint action plan signed in 2012 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the armed forces of Myanmar and to discuss the high number of grave violations against children committed by those forces. Pressure on non-governmental organizations under the Organization Registration Law enacted by the State Administration Council has increased child protection challenges, including regarding monitoring and reporting and access to life-saving services. The Myanmar armed forces have been listed under section A of annex I to the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict for attacks on schools and hospitals and the abduction of children, following an increase in these violations.

14. In the Philippines, the Inter-Agency Committee on Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), convened a workshop in August 2023 to discuss and agree on strategies to promulgate the inter-agency protocol on handling children in situations of armed conflict and agency protocols developed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In May 2023, the Armed Forces of the Philippines Center for Law of Armed Conflict presented to the United Nations progress made on the United Nations-Armed Forces of the Philippines strategic plan to prevent and respond to child rights violations in situations of armed conflict. The Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission is developing, in partnership with UNICEF, a manual of operations in its capacity as ombudsman for children in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

15. In Somalia, engagement continued with the Federal Government and the federal member states on the implementation of the 2012 action plans on ending the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children and the 2019 road map signed to expedite implementation of the action plans. Advocacy on the urgent need to protect children from continued high levels of grave violations, the majority of them committed by Al-Shabaab, as well as to prioritize child protection in the context of ongoing military operations was a priority. Notably, in July 2023, the Federal Government of Somalia endorsed the age verification guidelines and standardized checklist, a formal procedure for age assessment that will support the protection of children. Advances were also made with regard to the adoption of child protection legislation: both the child rights bill and the juvenile justice bill are at the parliamentary approval stage.

16. In Ukraine, the Government appointed a focal point on children and armed conflict and established an interministerial working group comprising all line ministries and other government entities. During the Special Representative's visit to Ukraine in May 2023, the Government made a commitment to develop, with the United Nations, a plan to prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict. The plan was signed on 18 August 2023 and implementation is ongoing. During the Special Representative's visit to the Russian Federation in May 2023, the Government discussed with her practical measures to protect children as set out in paragraph 340 of the most recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups have been listed under section B of annex II to the same report for attacks on schools and hospitals and the killing of children.

17. In Yemen, the Government and the United Nations continued their dialogue on the implementation of the 2014 action plan and the 2018 road map to end and prevent child recruitment and use, including the establishment of child protection units in all military regions and the conduct of field visits to disseminate directives banning child recruitment and to verify the absence of children from military ranks. In May 2023, in the context of the 2022 action plan signed with the Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah), the Joint Technical Committee and the United Nations visited a recruitment centre in Sana'a to discuss recruitment procedures and prevent the recruitment and use of children. In November 2023, the Special Representative conducted a mission to Yemen to engage with the Government on the sustained implementation of its action plan and road map. She also engaged with the Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah) on the implementation of their action plan and the handover protocol for children encountered in military operations signed in 2020. That same month, the Special Representative travelled to Saudi Arabia to continue her engagement with the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen in the framework of the 2019

memorandum of understanding and the 2020 related programme of time-bound activities. The Security Belt Forces have been moved from section A to section B of the list contained in annex I to the Secretary-General's latest annual report on children and armed conflict due to their continued participation in activities organized under the action plan and road map signed with the Government of Yemen.

B. Trends of continued concern

18. In recent years, some trends and harmful practices have taken a worrying hold, including attacks on education, the denial of humanitarian access to children and the detention of children for their actual or alleged association with armed groups.

19. Attacks on schools and hospitals and related personnel have continued to be of extreme concern, particularly in Ukraine, Burkina Faso, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Myanmar, Mali and Afghanistan. Throughout all situations covered by the mandate, government forces were the main perpetrators of such attacks, which were often linked to the increasing use of air strikes and explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas. The number of attacks on schools has remained high over the years, including attacks on students and educational personnel, and the military use of schools has increased, depriving children of their right to education and reducing the availability of safe and child-friendly spaces. Girls' education has frequently been targeted because of harmful gender norms, including attacks on girls' schools and the abduction of girls at school or on the way to school. Those attacks place children at particular risk, hindering their access to essential services, making them more vulnerable to other grave violations and, in the long run, jeopardizing their future.

20. Cases of denial of humanitarian access have continued to be verified at alarmingly high levels, with government forces the main perpetrators. Some situations involve long-term high levels of denial of humanitarian access, preventing children from receiving life-saving assistance and affecting their growth and development. The situation risks being exacerbated with the adoption of restrictive laws, decrees and regulations increasing control over humanitarian work and workers, notably in Afghanistan, Myanmar and parts of Yemen and in the Gaza Strip.

21. Children have continued to be detained in large numbers for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, including violent extremist groups, or for national security reasons. The high numbers of children verified as detained in Iraq, Israel, Myanmar, Somalia, and the Syrian Arab Republic are of particular concern. For instance, at the beginning of the reporting period, over 600 children, including foreigners, reportedly remained detained for alleged association with armed groups, mainly Da'esh, in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic, and over 55,500 persons, including about 31,000 children with suspected family ties to Da'esh continued to be held in Hawl and Rawj camps in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic. In these camps and in places of detention in the north-east, the security situation was volatile and the availability of clean water, food and medical and basic services remained inadequate, as access by humanitarian partners continued to be extremely limited. There is credible reporting of the forced separation of boys from their mothers, harsh confinement conditions, the denial of adequate medical care and very limited access to education for children in the camps. Incidents of violence, including murder, physical harm, intimidation and sexual violence, occur regularly, with no investigation or measures in place to prevent reoccurrence.

22. The effective reintegration of children who are allegedly associated with these armed groups must be the primary response. In circumstances where children are accused of a crime, any legal process should be conducted in compliance with due process, fair trial standards and international juvenile justice standards. Accordingly, the detention of children should always be a measure of last resort, for the shortest time possible and guided by the best interests of the child. In any circumstances, children should be treated primarily as the victims of violations of international law, in line with Security Council resolution 2427 (2018), the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

(Paris Principles), the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international human rights law and international humanitarian law instruments and standards.

23. The Special Representative used every opportunity to remind Member States of those principles and to call on them to develop and implement handover protocols to expeditiously hand over children who are captured or who surrender during military operations to civilian child protection actors to reintegrate them into their communities. The Office of the Special Representative continued to participate in the United Nations task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty and to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

C. Inclusiveness and emerging issues

1. Better protecting children with disabilities in armed conflict

24. In her previous report to the Human Rights Council on children and armed conflict,⁵ the Special Representative highlighted some of the risks faced by children with disabilities in armed conflict and stressed the need for a better understanding of the impact of armed conflict on such children to adequately address their specific requirements and inform protection responses. In December 2023, the Office of the Special Representative published, at an event organized with nine co-sponsors, including the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, a study on the children and armed conflict mandate and children with disabilities in armed conflict.⁶ In the study, the lack of available data on children with disabilities in armed conflict is emphasized. The lack of such data undermines efforts to gain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the impact of armed conflict on them and contributes to perpetuating their invisibility in the development of prevention and response measures. Despite this lack of data, the review of the available literature and interviews conducted with both child protection and disability-inclusion actors, including organizations of persons with disabilities, demonstrate the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on children with disabilities.

25. Children with disabilities are at higher risk of being recruited and used by armed forces and groups, being killed or maimed in hostilities, falling victim to sexual violence and being abducted in armed conflict. Pre-existing barriers to their full participation in daily life, such as a lack of access to schools and other services, are exacerbated by the destruction of infrastructure in conflict zones. The breakdown of these structures and the shrinking of safe spaces often correlate with an increased risk of grave violations. When armed attacks occur, children with disabilities may also experience difficulties fleeing violence. The inadequacy of early warning systems and evacuation procedures often complicates their escape. Children with disabilities may be left behind by parents or caregivers, especially when routes are inaccessible or when they are institutionalized. In conflict-affected areas, children with disabilities may not have access to assistive devices, such as wheelchairs or hearing aids, or such devices might be ill-adapted for their age, thus exposing such children to a higher risk of abduction, recruitment and use and killing and maiming.

26. Stigma, exclusion, a lack of protective social networks, a heightened risk of being unaccompanied and reliance on others for support and communication contribute to a higher vulnerability to sexual violence for children with disabilities. When it comes to reporting, children with disabilities and their families are less likely to report for fear of not being believed, owing to the common perception of children with disabilities as desexualized and therefore not potential targets for sexual violence.

27. While children with disabilities are not necessarily more at risk of experiencing attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access due to the collective nature of these grave violations, their impact on children with disabilities may be more severe. As they often require specific support and services, which are not readily available,

⁵ A/HRC/49/58.

⁶ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Towards Greater Inclusion: A Discussion Paper on the CAAC Mandate and Children with Disabilities in Armed Conflict* (United Nations, 2023).

children with disabilities are more likely to be left out of school and, when they do go to school, attacks may compel them to discontinue their education. This may lead to further isolation, depression, trauma and other psychological harm. In addition, attacks may prevent children with disabilities from having access to complementary services that are often provided in schools, such as medical care and psychosocial support. Out-of-school children are at a higher risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. Attacks on hospitals have a particularly detrimental effect on children with disabilities, as they may require regular access to specific medical care, counselling, rehabilitation or assistive technology. Furthermore, injuries or illnesses may lead to long-term or secondary impairments if not treated promptly and adequately by medical services. Likewise, the denial of humanitarian access prevents children with disabilities from having access to food, water and sanitation, health care, assistive devices and services and mental health and psychological support. This, in turn, may lead to worsening health conditions that favour the emergence of new or exacerbate existing long-term impairments.

28. To bridge existing gaps and promote a human rights-based approach to disability inclusion in the protection of children with disabilities in armed conflict, three main and complementary avenues were identified by the study. The first avenue is the strengthening of data collection on children with disabilities in the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict to build an evidence base for the impact of grave violations on children with disabilities and inform programming and policymaking to better protect such children. This includes the disaggregation of data by disability and the development for United Nations monitors of a guidance note on the killing and maiming of children to better consider the term “maiming” in relation to disabilities. The second avenue comprises consultations with persons with disabilities, including children, and the organizations that represent them to support the mainstreaming of disability inclusion into the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda and ensure that the experiences and needs of children with disabilities are adequately reflected in processes that concern them, including in mediation and peacebuilding efforts. The third avenue involves awareness-raising initiatives and the provision of capacity-building on disability inclusion and the rights of persons with disabilities, including but not limited to military personnel and United Nations child protection staff, to contribute to enhancing the protection of children with disabilities in armed conflict.

2. Climate insecurity impacts on conflict-affected children

29. In her previous report to the Human Rights Council, the Special Representative highlighted the adverse effects of the climate emergency on conflict as a risk multiplier. Subsequently, the Office of the Special Representative published a discussion paper that situated the children and armed conflict agenda within the climate, peace and security discussions, exploring the impacts of climate insecurity on the six grave violations against children. The paper was introduced in November 2023 at a high-level event co-organized with Andorra, Colombia, Mozambique and Switzerland.

30. The paper confirmed an existing gap in the understanding of the linkages between climate insecurity and its overall impacts on conflict-affected children as a specific group of rights holders. It set out the conclusion that the increasing frequency and severity of weather-related events, exacerbated by a global temperature rise, compounded existing risks and vulnerabilities faced by children living in conflict situations. This was manifested in particular in the links between the recruitment and use of children and the denial of humanitarian access.

31. Research in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic showed that the loss of livelihoods resulting from climate stressors was affecting the decision-making of children and their families and communities in relation to joining or rejoining armed groups. In addition, the research highlighted that climate-related stressors had a negative impact on people’s ability to sustainably reintegrate upon their return to their place of origin, for example, in the Syrian Arab Republic, where agricultural lands have been rendered unusable due to the combined impact of floods and high levels of unexploded ordnance resulting from conflict. The case of Somalia showed that armed groups were, at a minimum, aware of the impact of diminishing resources, such as water, on children and their

families and communities, and thus might instrumentalize access to such resources in their interactions with them.

32. Through examples in Ethiopia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic, the research signalled implications for conflict-affected children regarding their access to humanitarian aid in the context of climate-related events that overlay the conflict context.

33. The consequences for children's access to education and health services in response to food insecurity and livelihood loss due to drought were highlighted for Ethiopia and Somalia, as was an increase in such gender-based violations as higher child marriage rates and the adoption of other harmful coping strategies, among other effects. Such connections are further illustrated by the case of Cabo Delgado province, Mozambique, selected as a case study due to the conflict involving attacks by armed groups since 2019 in areas also affected by consecutive cyclones. At the same time, the paper underscored the need for a more comprehensive investigation into how climate stressors intersected with such incidents as attacks on schools and hospitals, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction and killing and maiming.

34. Despite a lack of data disaggregation, which resulted in the inability to access sufficient information on such intersecting factors as gender and disability, it was acknowledged in the paper that girls and children with disabilities were some of the most vulnerable groups and should be specifically considered to account for their differentiated experiences and needs.

35. The paper sets out a way forward for strengthening the understanding of climate insecurity impacts on conflict-affected children and overcoming existing challenges that hinder such efforts. This includes recommendations for strengthening coordination between United Nations workstreams on children and armed conflict and climate, peace and security, particularly at the field level, and better integrating child-centred risk assessments across the system.

IV. Raising awareness, mobilizing global action and building partnerships

A. Awareness-raising, including through field visits

36. As the leading United Nations advocate for the protection of conflict-affected children, the Special Representative continued to use her voice to raise awareness about the importance of protecting their rights and needs. During the reporting period, the Office of the Special Representative continued to issue press releases and public statements, some jointly with partners, including other high-level United Nations officials and external partners, to highlight issues related to the mandate. For example, she issued two joint statements with the Special Representative on Violence against Children: on the rapid escalation of hostilities in the Sudan, in April 2023, and on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in October 2023.

37. The Special Representative continued to engage the media in advocacy efforts, including through national and international media outlets, such as the Associated Press, Radio Mozambique, NTN 24, *Sankei News* and the Qatar News Agency.

38. She sought to inform diverse audiences, including by meeting with parliamentarians from Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Peru and the United States of America. In July 2023, she met with the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and provided a virtual briefing on confidence-building and children and armed conflict to religious leaders during a conference organized by the Luxembourg School of Religion and Society.

39. The Special Representative continued to take part in high-level events to raise awareness. In January 2023, she attended a conference on strengthening human rights in the crisis of peace and security, organized by Finland, Switzerland and Wilton Park, in the United

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In February 2023, also in the United Kingdom, her Office organized, together with Norway, UNICEF, Save the Children International, War Child UK and Wilton Park, a conference on the reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups. In May 2023, during Protection of Civilians Week, the Office of the Special Representative organized a side event with Colombia, Liechtenstein, Malta, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the All Survivors Project on ensuring the protection of and responses for all survivors, with a focus on gender-responsive measures for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The Special Representative also participated in a side event on education in armed conflict, organized by Japan, Malta, Luxembourg, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack and the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. In June 2023, the Special Representative attended an international conference on protecting children in armed conflict organized by Norway, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Save the Children International. In September 2023, she shared a video message for the national conference on the protection of children against sexual violence in South Sudan. In September 2023, for the observance of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, the Special Representative provided a video message to an event in Geneva organized by Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain, the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies and Save the Children International. The same month, in the margins of the high-level week of the General Assembly she organized, with Belgium, Malta, the European Union, UNICEF and Save the Children International, a high-level side event entitled “Working towards sustainable peace and development: putting children at the centre”. She also spoke at a side event entitled “Breaking chains, building futures: ending the detention of children in armed conflict” organized by Malta, the United States, UNICEF, Children in Conflict and War Child UK.

40. To advocate for the protection of conflict-affected children and raise awareness, the Special Representative travelled to Argentina, Belgium, Colombia, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Israel, Malta, Mozambique, Norway, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. More details on the different missions can be found throughout the present report.

41. The photo exhibition entitled “From despair to hope: children beyond armed conflict”, featuring the stories of conflict-affected children told through portraits taken by photojournalist Paddy Dowling, was presented in March 2023 at the United Nations Office at Geneva with the support of Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta and Uruguay.

42. The Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign, which ended in December 2023, continued to support the global advocacy efforts of the Special Representative and remained a strong part of the Office’s global communications strategy. A new public awareness-raising campaign, aimed at rallying the international community behind the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with children’s voices at the centre, will be launched in 2024. The new campaign is also part of a pledge delivered by the Special Representative on Human Rights Day in the context of an OHCHR high-level event marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

43. Amplifying the voices of conflict-affected children continued to be central to the Special Representative’s work. In February 2023, for the Security Council briefing on preventing grave violations against children, the Office of the Special Representative, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children, supported the virtual participation of Divina Maloum, a youth activist from Cameroon. In July 2023, at the Security Council annual open debate on children and armed conflict, the Office of the Special Representative, alongside Save the Children International and the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, supported the participation of a 17-year-old female activist from Colombia. Stories about conflict-affected children were included in the summary of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

B. Collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned

44. Collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 72/245, remained a key priority for the Special Representative.

45. In December 2022, the Office of the Special Representative published two studies in partnership with the All Survivors Project, one on strengthening responses to conflict-related sexual violence against boys deprived of their liberty in situations of armed conflict and the other on responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups in reintegration programmes. In October 2023, the Office renewed its partnership with the All Survivors Project. In December 2023, under this framework, the Office, together with the All Survivors Project and the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University, hosted a workshop in Bogotá to discuss early findings from research on the reintegration of boy survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Colombia.

46. In October 2023, the Office of the Special Representative started work on a study on the linkages between trafficking in children and the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Also in October 2023, the Office began the development of a guidance note on the denial of humanitarian access, in collaboration with the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UNICEF and in consultation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other stakeholders. These processes will continue in 2024.

C. Building and supporting global partnerships

47. The Special Representative actively engaged with Member States and other key stakeholders to build and support global partnerships aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children. She also encouraged Member States to endorse political commitments, including the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. During the reporting period, Australia and Guyana endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. The Office of the Special Representative continued to participate in the Paris Principles Steering Group.

48. The Special Representative and her Office held regular exchanges with Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, including in Brussels, Geneva and New York and in the countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In January 2023, a joint videoconference was held with the Groups of Friends in New York and Yemen, for which the Special Representative provided a video statement. The Special Representative met with the Brussels- and Geneva-based Groups of Friends in March 2023, the Group of Friends in Mozambique in April 2023, the New York-based Group of Friends in June 2023 and the Syrian Arab Republic Group of Friends and the Yemen Group of Friends, both based in Amman, in October 2023. The Office met regularly with Groups of Friends at the expert level, including in Geneva in September 2023 to provide training on the children and armed conflict mandate. In December 2023, the Special Representative briefed the Group of Friends on Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in preparation for the Summit of the Future.

49. The Office of the Special Representative continued to develop initiatives based on the research conducted by the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers. In March 2023, the Office held consultations in Nairobi with 20 civil society organizations consisting of or representing children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups. The consultations led to the issuance of a list of recommendations to inform reintegration programming and policymaking. That same month, the Office published an analysis on financing support for child reintegration, with plans to disseminate the

recommendations in 2024. A reintegration research group was established consisting of practitioners and members of academia.

50. As a member of Alliance 8.7, the Office of the Special Representative continued to share advocacy messages to support the implementation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

51. The Office of the Special Representative pursued its collaboration with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, including by participating in its advocacy working group and by delivering, in June 2023, a presentation to its annual meeting on understanding the impacts of climate insecurity on children and armed conflict. In October 2023, the Office provided input into the Alliance's key advocacy messages on child protection in humanitarian programming.

52. The Office of the Special Representative continued its engagement as part of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, including through participation in its annual principals' meeting in December 2022 and November 2023 and the joint calls for action launched on those occasions. The Office supported the implementation of the workplan of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group for the period 2022–2023, namely, the chapter pertaining to strengthening approaches to and the understanding of trafficking in persons in crisis contexts. In addition, during the reporting period, the Office joined the United Nations system-wide practice group on trafficking in all its forms.

53. The report on the Virtual Summer School on Child Protection in Armed Conflict, organized in 2022 by the Office of the Special Representative and the Government of Malta, with the support of the University of Malta, was published in May 2023. The report was launched the same month at a side event on strengthening child protection capacity by increasing the knowledge, competencies and skills of those contributing to the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda, co-sponsored by Belgium, Malta, Mozambique, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and the European Union. The Office of the Special Representative is currently developing a self-paced online introductory course on children and armed conflict that will be freely accessible through the web page of the United Nations System Staff College.

D. Building partnerships with regional and subregional organizations

1. African Union and regional counterparts

54. The Special Representative and her Office increased engagement at the senior and technical levels with the African Union, a key partner, and regional counterparts. In June 2023, the Special Representative held a meeting in Addis Ababa with the Special Envoy of the African Union on Youth. In September 2023, in New York, the Special Representative and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union discussed its initiative to mainstream child protection in regional peace and security efforts and ways to enhance cooperation on, among other issues, child-sensitive mediation and child-responsive early warning systems. The same month, the Special Representative and the Special Envoy of the African Union on Youth co-chaired a hybrid youth consultation on the development of a youth-led continental outreach campaign on the misuse of social media and other digital platforms and related risks for conflict-affected children.

55. In November 2023, in Kigali, the Special Representative provided a briefing on children and armed conflict and outlined recommendations on prevention measures to the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

56. In December 2023, in Banjul, the Special Representative delivered a briefing on children and armed conflict at a special open session of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. Participants included the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts, regional economic communities, regional coordination mechanisms, African Member States and other partners.

2. European Union

57. In February 2023, on the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, the Special Representative issued a statement with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the European Commission. In March 2023, at the European Humanitarian Forum, organized by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and Sweden, the Special Representative spoke at a session on stepping up the commitment to conflict-affected children across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. She also held a joint meeting with the Queen of Belgium, the European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management and the Executive Director of UNICEF. In addition, the Special Representative delivered remarks at an event on education in emergencies co-hosted by the Directorate-General and UNICEF. In Brussels, she held meetings with the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights and other high-level officials from the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the European Parliament. In September 2023, during the high-level week of the General Assembly, she met with the European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography and the Managing Director for the Global Agenda and Multilateral Relations at the European External Action Service.

58. The Special Representative's Europe Liaison Office provided information on children and armed conflict to interested stakeholders and followed relevant European Union policy discussions. It provided a briefing in March 2023 at a workshop on the contribution of Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations to the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda and, in June 2023, at the annual meeting of the Common Security and Defence Policy human rights and gender advisers. In July 2023, the Office of the Special Representative briefed Cabinet members of several European commissioners and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on children and armed conflict issues. In November 2023, the Europe Liaison Office participated in the joint European Union-United Nations annual meeting on prevention, stabilization and peacebuilding and provided a briefing on children and armed conflict at the annual seminar of rule of law and justice advisers in civilian Common Security and Defence Policy missions and at an event on children deprived of liberty organized at the European Parliament. In December 2023, the Europe Liaison Office provided a briefing to the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid.

3. Council of Europe

59. The Special Representative met with two representatives of the Council of Europe: in March 2023, she met with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration and Refugees and, in May 2023, with the Commissioner for Human Rights.

4. League of Arab States

60. The Special Representative maintained her engagement with the League of Arab States. In May 2023, the Office of the Special Representative and the League of Arab States organized a regional conference in Doha on the prevention of grave violations against children in armed conflict. The conference, which was hosted by Qatar in its capacity as Chair of the forty-second session of the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs, brought together Arab ministers for social affairs, regional United Nations entities and representatives of the Education Above All Foundation. Participants discussed child protection challenges in the region, including attacks on education and the heightened vulnerability of children with disabilities and of refugee children and internally displaced children. In an outcome document, they agreed on the importance of providing comprehensive and sustainable reintegration and assistance programmes to children across the region and of operationalizing the League's strategy entitled "Comprehensive plan to end child recruitment in armed and terrorist conflicts" and on making a concerted regional push towards prevention. In September 2023, the Special Representative addressed the Council of the League of Arab States on the subject of combating violence against children.

5. North Atlantic Treaty Organization

61. In June 2023, the Special Representative met with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary-General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security. During the reporting period, the Office of the Special Representative followed discussions on the NATO Policy on Children and Armed Conflict, adopted in July 2023. In December 2023, the Office participated in the United Nations-NATO staff talks.

6. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

62. In March 2023, the Special Representative met with the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In June 2023, the Special Representative's Europe Liaison Office provided a briefing to the OSCE Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict and supported the identification of areas of action for enhancing the Group's engagement on children and armed conflict.

E. Building partnerships within the United Nations system

63. The Special Representative continued to work with the Security Council and its relevant subsidiary organs. In February 2023, alongside the Special Representative on Violence against Children, she briefed the Security Council under the presidency of Malta on the importance of prevention efforts in ensuring the best protection for children in situations of armed conflict. Her Office also supported the organization of the Council's annual open debate on children and armed conflict, held in July 2023 under the presidency of the United Kingdom. She held 10 meetings with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, including to introduce the country reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan,⁷ Mali,⁸ South Sudan⁹ and the Syrian Arab Republic¹⁰ and to report on her country visits. Five global horizontal notes were issued to the Working Group. The Office also supported the organization of the visit of the Working Group to Nigeria in July 2023.

64. The Special Representative briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) concerning South Sudan and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) concerning Yemen.

65. In April 2023, the Office of the Special Representative, together with the European Union and Uruguay, organized a training session on children and armed conflict for experts of the Third Committee of the General Assembly and, in October 2023, the Special Representative presented her annual report¹¹ to the Third Committee at the Assembly's seventy-eighth session.

66. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. She continued to serve on the Steering Committee of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and, in April 2023, she participated in a principal-level meeting of the Committee, chaired by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In June 2023, she co-hosted, together with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Argentina, a commemorative event on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. As mentioned throughout the present report, the Special Representative collaborated on several initiatives with the Special Representative on Violence against Children, including joint events and statements. For

⁷ S/2023/893.

⁸ S/2022/856.

⁹ S/2023/99.

¹⁰ S/2023/805.

¹¹ A/77/895-S/2023/363.

example, in September 2023, the Special Representative published a press statement with the Special Representative on Violence against Children for the commemoration of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack.

67. The Special Representative pursued cooperation with other United Nations entities. She regularly met with senior officials of the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UNICEF and with resident coordinators. In December 2022 and October 2023, the Special Representative delivered a statement at the annual specialized training course on child protection for United Nations military personnel organized by the Department of Peace Operations. For the preparation of the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, she coordinated two task force meetings at the principal level comprising various United Nations partners that contribute to the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. Her Office also continued to contribute to the review of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards with regard to principles on the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, and to provide guidance on security sector reform.

68. OHCHR continued to be an important partner for the Special Representative, including through its field-level participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. In May 2023, the Special Representative met with the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Director of the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division of OHCHR. The Special Representative's Office continued to cooperate with ILO, UNHCR and the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding their participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. In May 2023, the Special Representative met with the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and, in June 2023, she met virtually with the Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme. In August 2023, the Special Representative's Europe Liaison Office met with ILO at the technical level to identify avenues for enhanced cooperation. The Europe Liaison Office facilitated her engagement with the Geneva-based United Nations partners.

69. Facilitated by the Special Representative's Analysis and Outreach Hub in Doha, implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Special Representative and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) began. Signed in September 2022, the memorandum of understanding is aimed at promoting collaboration and the exchange of expertise on education in the reintegration of conflict-affected children. In September 2023, the Special Representative participated in a high-level panel for the observance of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, organized by Qatar, UNESCO, UNICEF, the Education Above All Foundation and the Department of Global Communications. The same month she met with the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education.

70. In April 2023, at the Mine Action Service symposium, the Special Representative delivered remarks on the impact of mines and unexploded ordnance on children. In November 2023, the Special Representative shared a video message for the annual conference on Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), organized by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

71. As a core group member alongside OHCHR, the Office of the Special Representative on Violence Against Children and UNICEF, the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict participated in the development of the guidance note of the Secretary-General on child rights mainstreaming,¹² which was endorsed by the Executive Committee of the United Nations in July 2023. In addition, as part of the task team for "The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights" initiative, the Office contributed to the development of the Agenda for Protection, adopted in November 2023.

72. The Special Representative and her Office continued to participate in the system-wide working group on sexual exploitation and abuse. In December 2022 and February 2023, she

¹² Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/Guidance-Note-Secretary-General-Child-Rights-Mainstreaming-July-2023.pdf>.

took part in the meeting of the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.

73. Collaboration between the Special Representative and the International Criminal Court was sustained. In December 2022, she sent a video message to the high-level side event to the twenty-first session of the Assembly of States Parties entitled “Strengthening coordination and partnerships: the next step for supporting accountability for crimes against children”, organized by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Office of the Prosecutor, Save the Children International and Justice Rapid Response. The Office of the Special Representative also participated in the consultations organized by the Office of the Prosecutor on the revision of its policy on children and its policy on sexual and gender-based crimes. In July 2023, the Special Representative met with the Executive Director of the International Criminal Court Trust Fund for Victims.

F. Building partnerships with civil society and academia

74. Partnerships with civil society organizations and academia continued to be a priority for the Special Representative. She remained engaged with New York-based and Europe-based non-governmental organizations, her engagement with the latter facilitated through the Special Representative’s Europe Liaison Office, and with civil society partners during field visits. The Special Representative participated in dozens of civil society events and dozens more were attended by representatives of her Office.

75. In January 2023, the Special Representative participated in a workshop organized by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University. In March 2023, she provided a video statement for an event on trafficking in persons in armed conflicts and in post-conflict situations, organized by Caritas Internationalis, the Christian Organization against Trafficking in Human Beings, Secours Catholique – Caritas France and the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta. The same month, her Office participated in the experts’ round table on a new path towards accountability for crimes and violations affecting children in armed conflict, organized by Save the Children International. In April 2023, the Office provided inputs to the draft articles for a convention on conflict prevention and resolution being developed by the Institute for Integrated Transitions. In May 2023, it participated in a discussion on the impact on children of serious human rights violations affecting the environment, organized by Justice Rapid Response, Save the Children International and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In October 2023, the Special Representative spoke at a commemoration for Conflict Resolution Day organized by the Malta Foundation for the Well-being of Society. In November 2023, her Office attended an event organized by the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security entitled “Placing children at the heart of peace and security: from vision to action”. Also in November, the Office participated in an event on Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) organized by Malta, Nigeria, Norway, Switzerland, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack and the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

76. Regarding academia, in May 2023, the Special Representative provided a video message for the sixth biennial academic conference on the responsibility to protect in theory and practice, organized by the University of Ljubljana. In June 2023, she provided a video message for the Institut Louis Joinet Summer University programme on children and transitional justice. In October 2023, the Special Representative gave lectures at the University of Malta Centre for the Study and Practice of Conflict Resolution and at the Mediterranean Academy for Diplomatic Studies.

77. The Special Representative and her Office continued the collaboration with the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict by delivering opening remarks and a training session as part of its advanced training course on international criminal jurisdiction and children in armed conflict, in May 2023, and at its Autumn School on the judicial and social aspects of violence against children, particularly girls, in armed conflict, in October 2023.

V. Recommendations

78. The Special Representative remains deeply concerned by the scale and severity of grave violations committed against children in armed conflict. She calls upon all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law and to immediately end and prevent grave violations, including by taking all necessary measures to protect children during military operations, in line with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, and to avoid confrontations, where possible, in areas where civilians and children are present. The military use of schools or health facilities should be avoided by all parties to conflict, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

79. The Special Representative reminds all Member States that they must respect and ensure the rights of children, independently from their parents or guardians, and that children are entitled to special protection under international human rights law, particularly under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She calls upon Member States to recognize all persons under 18 years of age as children and calls upon the international community to increase its advocacy in that regard.

80. The Special Representative calls upon Member States that have not yet done so to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to adopt national legislation and policies to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations by armed forces and armed groups. She calls upon Member States to endorse instruments improving the protection of conflict-affected children, including the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles.

81. The Special Representative calls upon parties to armed conflicts to remove all impediments to humanitarian access to children and enable unimpeded access to education for conflict-affected children. She expresses concern about the increasing use of schools for military objectives and stresses that it is fundamental to preserve their civilian status. She urges Member States to do their utmost to protect schools, students and teachers, as well as hospitals, health-care institutions and health workers. She further calls for the adoption and implementation of special measures to ensure the continuous education of girls.

82. The Special Representative calls anew upon Member States to treat children allegedly associated with armed groups, including violent extremist groups, primarily as victims, prioritize their reintegration and address the 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 or alleged association, internationally recognized juvenile justice principles must be respected, including in relation to the minimum age of criminal responsibility and to ensuring that detention is used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time, as well as international due process and fair trial standards. The Special Representative calls upon the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies and relevant special procedure mandate holders to put emphasis on the need to ensure the observance and protection of child rights while countering terrorism and implementing national security measures.

83. The Special Representative calls upon Member States and other relevant stakeholders to take effective and appropriate steps to ensure the protection and safety of children with disabilities in situations of armed conflict, including through the collection of data disaggregated by disability, age and gender, and to consult persons with disabilities, including children, and their representative organizations in conflict mitigation and peacebuilding efforts. She urges Member States and other relevant stakeholders to address the specific requirements of children with disabilities in their planning, response and recovery actions in conflict and post-conflict situations in order to identify and eliminate obstacles to ensuring their safety and to mobilize adequate, timely and predictable resources to that end.

84. The Special Representative encourages Member States and other relevant stakeholders to integrate a child protection lens in tackling climate emergencies in armed conflict settings, including through enhanced synergies between the children and armed conflict and the climate, peace and security agendas, strengthened coordination among United Nations system entities with a stake in those agendas and the use of child-centred risk assessments for anticipating and addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children living in areas affected by both climate-related stressors and armed conflict, with a view to preventing the six grave violations against children.

85. 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 Council to continue to include references to child rights violations and conflict-affected children in its resolutions establishing or renewing the mandates of special procedures, commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigations, and to foresee in those resolutions dedicated expertise on child rights. The Special Representative further encourages Member States to ensure that dedicated child protection resources and capacity are allocated in relevant budgetary provisions.

86. The Special Representative welcomes the continued attention paid to the impact of armed conflict on children in the reports of States to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee. She urges relevant Member States to include, as appropriate, specific references to information on grave violations against children, accountability initiatives and gaps in their applicable legal and policy frameworks in their submissions to those bodies.
