



# Security Council

Eightieth year

**9945**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 25 June 2025, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

*President:* Ms. Vindhya Vasini Persaud . . . . . (Guyana)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Bendjama
China . . . . .	Mr. Fu Cong
Denmark . . . . .	Ms. Lassen
France . . . . .	Mr. Bonnafont
Greece . . . . .	Mr. Sekeris
Pakistan . . . . .	Mr. Ahmad
Panama . . . . .	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Sangjin Kim
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Ms. Swallow
Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
Somalia . . . . .	Mr. Dhakkar
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Shea

## Agenda

### Children and armed conflict

Effective strategies to end and prevent grave violations against children

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2025/247)

Letter dated 10 June 2025 from the Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2025/366)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Children and armed conflict**

#### **Effective strategies to end and prevent grave violations against children**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2025/247)**

#### **Letter dated 10 June 2025 from the Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2025/366)**

**The President:** Before each member is a list of speakers who have requested to participate in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, as well as the previous practice of the Council in this regard. We propose that they be invited to participate in this meeting.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2025/247, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, and document S/2025/366, which contains a letter dated 10 June 2025 from the Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

**Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter:** I thank Guyana for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict. I express profound gratitude to my fellow briefers and to colleagues worldwide, who risk their lives daily to shield children from the horrors of war, restoring hope amid the darkest of circumstances.

The findings that I present today were documented amid extraordinary adversity and insecurity. The year 2024 witnessed an unprecedented escalation of violence against children and a devastating record of attacks on humanitarian personnel and United Nations staff on the ground. Consistent with the Security Council mandate on children and armed conflict, all the information in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2025/247) is based solely on United Nations-verified data collected under the established standards of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on children and armed conflict.

The year 2024 marked a devastating new record: the United Nations verified 41,370 grave violations against children, a staggering 25 per cent increase compared to 2023. Behind those numbers are the shattered stories, dreams and futures of 22,495 children, each of them profoundly affected by war, displacement and the collapse of protection systems that should have served as their shield. In those figures, we witness a sharp rise in the number of children subjected to multiple grave violations — 3,137 in total — through the convergence of abduction, recruitment and sexual violence, representing a stark reminder of the compounded vulnerabilities that children face in conflict settings. All too often, children continue to bear the brunt of relentless hostilities, indiscriminate attacks, blunt disregard for ceasefires and peace efforts and shocking disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law. All of those occur in a context of deepening humanitarian crises at unprecedented levels.

Let us discuss the six grave violations that the Security Council entrusted to my office. In 2024, 11,967 children were killed or maimed — most often by explosive ordnance, crossfire and anti-personnel landmines. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas, along with indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, had a grim impact on civilians, including children. This year's figures reflect the highest number of children killed and maimed since this mandate was established more than two decades ago. Where explosive weapons do not kill, they inflict lifelong injuries and disabilities that amplify trauma and stigma and severely hinder recovery and reintegration, robbing children and their communities of a future free of trauma and hatred. Examples abound: nine Palestinian children, aged 1 to 16 years, were killed by Israeli air strikes on a school sheltering internally displaced families in Gaza City. And in Bethlehem, a 12-year-old Israeli boy was shot and killed by an individual Palestinian perpetrator who opened fire on a bus outside an Israeli settlement. Each child struck by those attacks carried a story — a stolen life, a dream interrupted, a future obscured by senseless violence and protracted conflict.

The recruitment and use of children persisted at very high levels and amounted to 7,402 verified cases. In Nigeria, 43 children from Ngala were held and used by Islamic State West Africa Province and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad. The children managed to escape captivity; that is why we know about them. Yet, we also witnessed glimmers of hope: in Afghanistan, 58 boys previously recruited were released from the Taliban ranks following United Nations advocacy, with 48 enrolled in United Nations reintegration programmes, demonstrating that constructive and principled engagement saves lives and restores childhood. Girls have not been as fortunate in Afghanistan, as they continue to be deprived of an education beyond primary schooling.

Sexual violence against children increased by a stunning 35 per cent, reaching 1,982 verified cases, with a dramatic rise in instances of gang rape, underscoring the systematic use of sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of warfare. In Haiti, two 15-year-old girls were raped by members of an armed gang, while taking refuge with their family after their parents had been killed by another armed group. Their childhood was brutally taken from them, and they were forced to endure new trauma, stigmatization and fear in a place that should have been their sanctuary, compounding the deep pain of their already devastating loss. The physical and psychological scars borne by survivors last a lifetime, affecting families, communities and the very fabric of societies. The international community must confront that crime with zero tolerance and ensure that survivors receive comprehensive survivor-centred care.

Attacks on schools and hospitals surged alarmingly in 2024 to 2,374 cases, further endangering children's right to education and healthcare. Those attacks not only destroy critical infrastructures but also traumatize students, teachers, patients and medical staff. In Cameroon, repeated attacks on hospitals have forced closures, cutting off vital medical services for vulnerable populations. Similarly, schools in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Syria have been targeted, turning places of learning into zones of fear. Consider the horror endured by children in Myanmar, where, during school hours, air strikes by the Myanmar armed forces targeted a middle school in Kayah state, which was sheltering internally displaced persons. Four boys were killed, several children severely injured, and the school buildings destroyed. That single act reflects a pattern of disregard for protected spaces, which has now become the norm in several contexts. Children no longer have protected spaces. They are floating in a sea of hatred and violence. We must urgently condemn and halt those assaults to protect children's right to education and health and give them back the safe spaces that they desperately need.

In 2024, thousands of children were forcibly abducted, taken from their homes and families, often to be recruited, exploited, raped or used as human shields. Those abductions inflict profound trauma, tearing apart families and communities, while

robbing children of their safety and dignity. Such acts of abduction are not only brutal crimes but also deliberate tactics to terrorize and control populations. They must be met with unwavering condemnation and urgent action to secure the safe release and reintegration into communities of all abducted children. I commend efforts by Member States, international organizations and partners that have dedicated time and effort to ensuring that children who are separated can be reunited with their families.

Lastly, the denial of humanitarian access has now become one of the gravest obstacles to protecting children in conflict zones. In 2024, attacks on aid convoys, arbitrary detentions of humanitarian workers and bureaucratic barriers severely hindered the delivery of essential services such as food, healthcare and education. Recently, the Secretary-General called on the Houthis to release dozens of United Nations and humanitarian personnel arbitrarily detained in Yemen. The obstruction of assistance exacerbates children's suffering and undermines the basic principles of humanity and international law. When aid does not reach those in desperate need, the most vulnerable, especially children, are the ones who pay the highest price, as we see in places such as Gaza, Haiti and Darfur, where children are trapped in conflict zones without hope or relief, without access to life-saving assistance, endlessly shifting places to strive to survive but still abandoned by all.

Those atrocities against children span the globe — from Borno state to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, from Port-au-Prince to Cauca, from Darfur to Gaza — demonstrating the universal and indiscriminate nature of those grave violations. The highest numbers of grave violations last year were verified in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Nigeria and Haiti. The sharpest percentage increases occurred in Lebanon with a 545 per cent increase, Mozambique with a 525 per cent increase, Haiti with a 490 per cent increase, Ethiopia with a 235 per cent increase and Ukraine with a 105 per cent increase.

We cannot continue to stand by and watch with inaction what is happening to children globally, especially in Gaza. The scale of destruction and suffering borne by the children of Gaza defies and contravenes every human standard. There is no justification for depriving children of access to the means of survival, including access to food, healthcare and security. I recently called on Israel to facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief to civilians in need in the Gaza Strip. I also called on all parties to the conflict in Gaza to expedite the distribution of aid, because international humanitarian law applies to every party in every conflict, and it must be respected. And, for that reason, I also call on Hamas to immediately release all Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza.

In 2024, almost half of all grave violations were committed by non-State armed groups, in particular killing, maiming, abduction, recruitment and use and sexual violence. However, Government forces remained the principal perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access to children. That is unacceptable. The involvement of militias and private security companies further complicates responsibilities and accountability, making safety and security for children even more improbable in situations of armed conflict. In these violent and hopeless times, children are further punished for their actual or alleged association with armed groups. Three thousand and eighteen children were deprived of liberty, often in disregard of international juvenile justice standards. I emphasize that children are victims and must be treated and supported as such and never as criminals for their mere association with armed groups or enemies. Children's rights to justice should be upheld. Children have a right to an identity, and, in line with their best interests, they should be repatriated when they are abandoned in camps and detention centres simply because no one cares about what happens to them.

Despite the drawdown of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions and a global decline in humanitarian and child protection funding, the United Nations was still able to verify the shocking increase in grave violations during 2024. The scale of the brutality and the urgent need for system-wide responses, backed by sustainable and predictable resources, are already evident in the difficulties we experienced in monitoring, verification and reporting during 2024. The reduction in child protection expertise will lead to an inability to verify violations and, more importantly, to identify the perpetrators of such violations. Any further reduction in human and material resources during 2025 will severely strain operations, limit protection capacities and have devastating consequences for conflict-affected children. Additional reductions would further undermine the verification of violations and will risk compromising engagement with parties to conflict to secure releases and sign action plans to improve the situation of children.

Despite the ongoing reductions and challenges, my Office was still able to engage with parties to conflict and the United Nations on the ground was able to release more than 16,482 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups. These children also received protection or reintegration support from our partners, mainly UNICEF. Over the past 25 years, the children and armed conflict mandate has led to the release of more than 200,000 children and prevented untold numbers of further killings, maimings, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals. The signature and implementation of more than 40 action plans by State and non-State actors, including several that have since been completed, have resulted in the delisting of parties and have demonstrated the effectiveness of the tools at our disposal when political will exists. Some prevention plans have been put in place since resolution 2427 (2018) was adopted. Those prevention plans and measures have led to significant decreases in violations against children and have even allowed some situations to be removed from the children and armed conflict agenda altogether.

The way forward is clear: we must call on all parties to conflict, particularly the armed forces and armed groups listed in the annexes to the present report, to engage constructively with the United Nations to develop, sign and fully implement action plans that end and prevent grave violations against children. We must urge all parties named in the report, even if not listed, to adopt robust and effective prevention measures without further delay. The United Nations stands ready to assist all of them in that endeavour.

All parties to conflict should immediately cease grave violations against children, comply fully with international humanitarian law and international human rights law and guarantee rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access for all children — regardless of age, gender, nationality or status. The deliberate targeting and military use of schools, hospitals and essential water and sanitation infrastructure must end.

Member States should uphold the full range of international legal instruments and political commitments governing the protection of children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, as well as the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We must also strongly urge the ratification and implementation of treaties prohibiting certain weapons, including the Arms Trade Treaty, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. These weapons have a devastating impact on children and will continue to do so for decades to come. We should recommit to those conventions and treaties without delay.

We must invest in long-term, inclusive reintegration programmes — including for survivors of sexual violence, children with disabilities and those from marginalized, displaced, migrant or refugee communities. The denial of humanitarian access on such an alarming scale and the unprecedented targeting of humanitarian workers demand our unified condemnation and decisive action. In line with resolutions 2730 (2024) and 2601 (2021), all parties must fully comply with their obligations to protect humanitarian personnel and ensure the safety of schools and medical facilities.

Lastly, children associated with armed groups must be recognized first and foremost as victims, with deprivation of liberty applied as a last resort only, for the shortest possible time, and always in line with international juvenile justice standards and the best interests of each child. The United Nations and child protection actors must be granted systematic and meaningful access to detained children.

As United Nations peace operations transition, reconfigure or withdraw, we must ensure that child protection frameworks are preserved and transferred in accordance with resolution 2764 (2024). The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on children and armed conflict requires reinforcement and support through predictable, flexible and multi-year funding. Child protection must be mainstreamed across all mandates and processes — from early warning and mediation to transitional justice, security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

Member States and civil society must also continue to mobilize political commitment for conflict-affected children through advocacy, including by joining initiatives such as the Prove It Matters campaign, which I invite one and all to endorse and support. Let us renew the global consensus on child protection and uphold every child's fundamental right to life, health, education and a safe future. Governments that have not yet done so should reaffirm their commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure its full implementation through awareness-raising at every level. We cannot afford to return to the dark ages, where children were invisible and voiceless victims of armed conflict. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and its mandates have striven for 30 years to bring these children to the light. Please do not allow them to slip back into the shadows of despair.

In conclusion, wars and armed conflict are inflicting excruciating levels of violence on children. As conflicts rage across the globe, children around the world are being killed, maimed, starved or raped. It is as if parties to war and conflict, and we — the international community — had chosen to settle our disputes through military means at an enormous cost to our children, rather than choosing to negotiate peace for their benefit.

That is why, until such a time as peace prevails for the sake of children, the children and armed conflict mandate will remain a cornerstone of the Organization's peace and security architecture. It has proven its value — saving lives, restoring hope and holding perpetrators accountable. Above all else, this mandate has been a vehicle for constructive engagement with parties to conflict and has often led to a change in the behaviour of parties to conflict, putting in place measures to better protect children even under extreme situations. The children and armed conflict agenda has refocused its attention on children by asking Member States to demonstrate that the rights and protections of children are important. Let us prove that it matters — that they, our children, matter. Let us act with the urgency, courage and unity this moment demands. Let us ensure that no child is again left invisible in conflict and that the world's children will never again be used and abused by, in and for armed conflict.

**The President:** I thank Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Sheema SenGupta, Director of Child Protection of UNICEF.



**Ms. SenGupta:** First of all, let me thank Guyana for allowing UNICEF the opportunity to address the Council today.

As we gather here, I want to begin with a simple, painful truth: this year's report from the Secretary-General (S/2025/247) once again confirms what too many children already know — that the world is failing to protect them from the horrors of war. The United Nations verified the highest number of grave violations against children since this agenda began — a 25 per cent increase from 2023, which was already the highest total ever recorded. Thousands of children have been killed and maimed and thousands more have been recruited, abducted, raped or denied humanitarian assistance. And those are just the verified cases. We all know that the real number — the real scale of the harm — is far higher. Each violation against children in every country around the globe represents a moral failure, and each leaves scars that may never fully heal.

Behind those numbers are names, faces and lives. In the Sudan, a 14-year-old girl was gang-raped in her family home. Her mother was held at gunpoint throughout the daughter's rape and was warned not to say anything to anyone. In Nigeria, six boys aged 9 to 12 found a metallic object and brought it to a welder to sell it as scrap metal. The ordnance exploded as the welder was examining it, killing him and the boys.

That is happening every day at a scale difficult to fathom. In Israel and the State of Palestine last year, more than 8,000 grave violations have been verified. In Gaza, children bear the brunt of that suffering.

Nowhere else in the world has such a high number of grave violations been recorded since the Council established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on children and armed conflict, 20 years ago.

In those contexts and beyond, we are witnessing a breakdown in the basic protections each of those children are owed — not just as a legal matter, but as a matter of human decency. Let me highlight two deeply disturbing trends.

First, the increased use of explosive weapons in populated areas. That is now the leading cause of child casualties in many of the world's conflicts, accounting for more than 70 per cent of all incidents of killing and maiming. Those weapons tear through homes, schools, hospitals and shelters, even as families huddle inside, hoping they will be spared. From the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Gaza and Myanmar, from the Sudan to Ukraine and Lebanon, children continue to be injured or killed not just in crossfire — but as a direct result of bombing campaigns, shelling and explosive remnants of war. Those weapons do not just harm children at the moment of impact. The destruction of water systems, electricity, homes, hospitals, schools and playgrounds directly affects children's access to health, education, safe water and a safe place to play and sleep — the very foundations of childhood. They leave behind unexploded ordnance that will kill and maim for years to come. Every unexploded shell left in a field, schoolyard or alley is a death sentence waiting to be triggered.

Secondly, there is the surge in sexual violence. Verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children increased by 35 per cent in 2024. That is just the verified cases — and we all know how underreported that violation is — as victims, especially children, often fear stigma, shame, or retaliation if they come forward.

Those are not just grave violations in technical terms. Those are acts of brutality that destroy lives. Survivors face not only physical injuries and trauma, but stigma, rejection and sometimes further abuse.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, during the first two months of 2025 alone, nearly 10,000 cases of rape and sexual violence were reported by child

protection partners. More than 40 per cent of those affected were children. To put it plainly, during that turbulent period, we estimated that a child was raped every 30 minutes.

Haiti stands out as another striking example, with hundreds of cases — often involving gang rape by armed groups — recorded in territory under their control.

In Somalia and Mali, similar patterns are being verified, illustrating a trend that cannot be otherwise classified as a systemic failure to protect children. Nevertheless, impunity remains the norm. Survivors struggle to access the care and support they need. Perpetrators are rarely held accountable. We must change that.

Those facts are devastating, but they do not tell the full story, because even amid growing violence and shrinking resources, the children and armed conflict agenda remains a source of hope.

In 2024, more than 16,000 children exited armed forces and groups and received protection and reintegration support — a lifeline for children to reclaim their futures. And we saw important progress in other areas.

In Syria, the opposition Syrian National Army signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use, and the killing and maiming, of children. In the Central African Republic, a handover protocol now facilitates the swift transfer of children from armed groups to civilian care. In Colombia, former commanders were indicted for war crimes, including for recruitment and sexual violence against children. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, children are being separated from national security forces through age assessments and United Nations screening. In Haiti, transitional authorities created a joint task force to implement handover protocols for children associated with armed groups. And in Iraq, Pakistan, Libya and the Philippines, Governments have made tangible commitments to end grave violations.

Those examples remind us that where there is political will, progress is possible. They also underscore the vital role of humanitarian access and child protection actors, many of whom work at great personal risk.

UNICEF calls on the Council and Member States to take urgent action in six key areas.

First, they must demand that all parties to conflict respect international humanitarian law and end grave violations. That includes signing and fully implementing action plans with the United Nations; releasing children from armed ranks and handing them over for reintegration; issuing clear command orders against violations and enforcing accountability; recognizing children as victims, not threats; and ending the detention of children for alleged association with armed groups.

Secondly, the Council and Member States must stop the use and proliferation of explosive weapons in populated areas. That means endorsing and implementing the political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas; halting transfers of such weapons to parties known to target civilians, their homes, schools and hospitals; and upholding the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. We cannot allow the support for those life-saving treaties to unravel.

Thirdly, they must protect and expand humanitarian space. Access is being denied at unprecedented levels. More humanitarian workers, including United Nations staff, were killed in 2024 than in any previous year. That is intolerable. Aid must reach children wherever they are, safely and without obstruction.



Fourthly, they must support and facilitate humanitarian engagement with non-State armed groups to increase the protection of children and to secure access. Over the years, that engagement has delivered results for children, by promoting adherence to international law and by enabling the adoption of immediate and concrete measures, including the adoption of action plans.

Fifthly, the Council and Member States must fund this agenda. Severe budget cuts are undermining our ability to monitor, prevent and respond. Reintegration programmes are being reduced. Mental health support is vanishing. Specialized, life-saving care for survivors of sexual violence is becoming harder to access. Without adequate, predictable funding, the children and armed conflict agenda cannot deliver.

Lastly, all States have a duty not only to respect international humanitarian law, but to ensure that others do as well. Any support — military, financial or political — to parties to conflict must come with clear expectations and conditions for the protection of children.

UNICEF was born out of the rubble of war, created to serve the most vulnerable — children caught in conflict. That mission has never been more urgent than it is today. Children are not collateral damage. They are not soldiers. They are not bargaining chips. They are children, and they deserve to be safe. They deserve justice. They deserve a future. The Council has a unique role to play in making that future possible. We cannot allow these grave violations against children to continue unchecked. This just cannot be the new normal. Let us act with urgency. Let us act with courage. And above all, let us act with the conviction that every child, no matter where they are, deserves to live in peace.

**The President:** I thank Ms. SenGupta for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Sila.

**Sila** (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you so much, Madam President, for giving us your valuable time.

My name is Sila, and I am 17 years old. I am from Idlib, Syria. I am one of thousands of people who have lived through every aspect of the war, a member of a generation that has never known anything called safety — that has known only smoke, bombing, displacement and fear. To be honest, I did not come here today to talk about the war itself. I came to talk about the effects of the war, about my story with the war, about the pain that remains even if the guns are silent and about the small hope in my heart that there is a better future, God willing.

My first memory of the war was when I was only 3 years old. Suddenly I awoke to the sound of an explosion, as glass shattered, and my parents were shouting, “hurry up!”. From then on, our house became a suitcase, and our road the road of displacement. Every time we would become accustomed to a place, we would leave it under shelling, and every time we made a friend, we would have to say goodbye and continue on our way. My childhood was full of fear and anxiety and of people who were taken from me, people with whom I had shared the best days of my life.

Imagine going to school while hearing the sound of a plane overhead and not knowing whether or not one would return home. Imagine sitting in a classroom, present in body while wondering when the next shell will hit the school, home or even a loved one. I heard the sound of bombing and experienced all kinds of fear. I lost people who were dear to me, and since then, nothing in my life has been normal. I have developed a phobia of any sound that resembles the sound of a plane, a phobia of the dark and even of stillness.

One day, my cousin went out to get us some bread. His sister and I were watching him from the window. A little while later, we heard the sound of fighter jets and an

explosion. Smoke filled the air. People were running in the streets, and my cousin disappeared. We never saw him again. It was one of the most difficult moments of my life, and I am still unable to forget it or to get over it.

Another time, my aunt's house was bombed. We ran over, but they would not let us get close to the house, and at that very moment that we were running over, our house was bombed. The result was that in one moment I lost my aunt and our home, the home where I had lived and made my childhood memories, and we continued on our journey of displacement. It felt like the shelling was chasing us from house to house.

There are many memories that are seared into my mind and that I cannot get over, like the time I was holding my younger brother's hand walking down the street and then, suddenly, there was an explosion. The force of the blast threw us apart for a few minutes, and for a moment, I thought I lost my brother. Those were the longest minutes of my life. When I found him, I ran to him. I hugged him even though I was injured. I did not feel it. I was afraid only for him, not for myself.

War does not end when the shelling stops. The real danger continues after the war: the landmines, the unexploded shells and the lives that have turned into death traps. A child might see any shiny object and run towards it, not knowing that it is a land mine. People walk on their land, unaware that death lies underneath their feet. Many have lost limbs or even their lives, without ever being part of any battle. Our neighbour's son, who was only 18 years old, returned to check on their house after returning from displacement. A mine exploded in the house, and he lost his hand.

Today, I am here to address the Council about this, but I am doing more than talking. In fact, I am actively working on this issue. I recently participated in training courses with a humanitarian organization, and I am currently volunteering as part of an awareness-raising team. We are working on awareness-raising campaigns about the risks posed by remnants of war, especially to children. I am trying to be a voice in this field to deliver the message to as many people as possible. Without removing those remnants of war, there will be no real hope or return. There can be no real future for us unless they are removed. Now it is our time to speak up, to raise our voices and to educate others.

I did not come here today as a victim. I came here as a witness. I came to deliver a message. I came to speak on behalf of every child who was promised a normal, peaceful life but was not able to live it, on behalf of every mother who buried her child and on behalf of every home that lost its warmth. I stand before Council members today to deliver one message: it is not only on the map that the war must end. It must end on our streets, in our memories and in the toys of our children. God willing, we will be the last generation to live this pain, the last generation to fall asleep to the sound of missiles and to wake up to fear.

Thankfully, today there is more safety, and we are able to dream and to work on ourselves. I can continue my education and achieve my ambitions. I can help my community and my family. But in order to make those dreams a reality, we need many things. Most importantly, we need opportunity, and we need decisions. We still need the Council's support.

My final message is that I am from a generation that survived physically — that is true. However, our hearts are still living in fear. Please help us replace the word "displacement" with "return", the word "rubble" with "home" and the word "war" with "life". I thank Council members for listening. I hope that the Council's decisions today will make for a safer tomorrow for every Syrian child dreaming of walking to school on his or her own two feet, without fear.

**The President:** I thank Sila for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister of Human Services and Social Security of Guyana.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the UNICEF Director of Child Protection, Ms. Sheema SenGupta, for their briefings.

I convey Guyana's sincere appreciation to our child briefer, Sila, for sharing her story of resilience with the Security Council. The hopes she shared for a better and safer future represent the aspirations of the almost half a billion children worldwide who are living in conflict: children whose lives are being shattered daily by violence; children for whom fear has become a constant companion — fear of death, injury, abduction, sexual violation, starvation and separation from loved ones.

The places that should offer children the greatest protection — their homes, their schools and even hospitals — are being attacked and destroyed with little regard for protection obligations under international humanitarian law. The denial of humanitarian aid is depriving children not only of life-saving sustenance and healthcare but also of their dignity as they jostle for morsels of food under dangerous conditions.

The 25 per cent increase in grave violations against children recorded in the Secretary-General's report for 2024 (S/2025/247) must galvanize the Council to protect children. It is my fervent hope that today's debate will be an opportunity to not just express outrage but to follow through with tangible action. I reaffirm Guyana's unwavering commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the relevant Council resolutions. We regret that even though the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights treaty, there is persistent disregard for children's rights, including their right to life, dignity, education and health. In several conflicts, Government forces were the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. The umbrella that international law should provide to children is being dismantled daily. Guyana calls on all parties to conflict to comply with international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to immediately end and prevent violations and abuses against children. Inaction by the international community and impunity for perpetrators are emboldening them to commit greater violations. We must be consistent in condemning all violations and abuses of children. National and international justice systems must scale up investigations and prosecutions.

The violation verified in the greatest numbers was the killing and maiming of children, primarily by explosive ordnance, crossfire between parties to conflict and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. For the second consecutive year, the highest numbers of grave violations were verified in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in the Gaza Strip. Contact with unexploded ordnance and mines was the leading cause of child casualties in Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Syrian Arab Republic, and thousands became permanently disabled. Some 5 million children in Syria live in areas contaminated with lethal explosives, creating immense risks with every step they take. Guyana urges Member States to ratify and implement the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction as a tangible commitment to protecting children. With 165 States already parties to the Convention, this debate must be a catalyst for universal ratification. Donors are encouraged to scale up funding for the clearing of explosive ordnance, risk education and victim assistance.

It is abhorrent that sexual violence is being used as a tactic of war. The alarming 35 per cent increase in verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in 2024, including the sharp increase in gang rape, should spur us

all to action. Holding perpetrators accountable is key to stemming that deplorable trend. The listing of perpetrators in the annex to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, Security Council sanctions and the scaling-up of prosecutions can contribute to reducing that scourge. The Council must use all the tools at its disposal to protect children and deter continued violations. That includes prioritizing child protection in mandate renewals of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions and supporting the continuity of child protection programmes by United Nations country teams and national authorities.

As we engage in the UN80 Initiative towards a more efficient Organization, we must ensure that mandate and funding cuts are not at the expense of the protection of children. The children and armed conflict framework, including the monitoring and reporting mechanisms, remains critical in informing the Council's responses and its engagement with parties to conflict to address grave violations against children.

Lastly, I emphasize that children do not start wars, and they should never be made to suffer their horrific consequences. Ultimately, their best protection is peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Sekeris** (Greece): I would like to thank Guyana for organizing this very important open debate. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, and Ms. SenGupta from UNICEF for their briefings. I also commend Sila, the civil society briefer, for her strong testimony. We would like to commend the continued work, efforts and dedication of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her strong engagement for the protection of children. We also thank UNICEF for its invaluable contribution.

The Secretary-General's latest annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2025/247) paints a grim picture of violence and erosion of respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The year 2024 bore witness to an alarming escalation in grave violations against children caught in armed conflicts. Children are killed or maimed, often bearing the brunt of lifelong disabilities, owing in many cases to the widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas. They are denied safe, timely and unimpeded access to life-saving humanitarian assistance. They are recruited and used on the battlefield. Children are subjected to sexual violence, which is blatantly and systematically used as a tactic of war, and to other violations of their right to life, safety, health, dignity, education, recovery and social reintegration. Equally alarming is the fact that killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access are mainly attributed to State actors, while non-State armed groups perpetrated almost 50 per cent of grave violations in 2024. The unprecedented levels of violence against children reached holds particularly true of the situations in Israel, Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Nigeria, Haiti, Lebanon, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Ukraine.

Greece strongly condemns all grave violations and abuses against children in armed conflict. We are deeply concerned about the extreme levels of violence reflected in the detailed review of 26 conflict situations in the Secretary-General's latest annual report. We call upon all parties to conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law, including to respect the special protections afforded to children, to allow and facilitate the safe, timely and unimpeded access of children to humanitarian assistance and to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and assets and civilian infrastructure. Greece welcomes the annual report as an insightful call not just for reflection on one of the greatest affronts to

international law but also for action in order to protect children from the devastating impact of wars.

Greece reiterates its strong support for the United Nations mandate for children in armed conflict as a strategic component of the United Nations peace and security work. As Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we take on this responsibility with a firm commitment to advancing the protection of children. Our goal is to develop an inclusive, carefully balanced, impartial, constructive and action-oriented approach in close cooperation with our partners in the group, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF, United Nations agencies and civil society representatives.

Recognizing the urgent need to end and prevent violations and abuses against children, I would like to emphasize the following brief points.

We call upon all parties to conflict, especially those listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report, to engage with the United Nations and to develop credible action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children. We urge the parties who have already signed action plans to implement them.

Greece stresses the need to hold perpetrators of grave violations accountable and encourages Governments to undertake initiatives that facilitate relevant investigations and contribute to the timely and meaningful administration of justice.

Evidence on sexual violence against children is nothing less than shocking, all the more so considering that the reported increase represents the tip of the iceberg, as such violations are vastly underreported. We need to ensure that parties to conflict take measures to end and prevent such violations and that sexual and reproductive health services are provided to child victims.

Greece commends the unwavering commitment of child protection actors who, despite reduced funding and the scaling down of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions, continue to deliver coordinated and effective action.

In closing, let me stress that this year marks three key anniversaries: 80 years since the drafting of the Charter of the United Nations, our road map to a better future; 20 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), establishing the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and 25 years since the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On this occasion, I think that we should ask ourselves: are we living up to our promises to children? Our answer must come through actions, not words. We have to remain true to our commitment to defend children — if children survive, then there is hope.

**Mr. Ahmad** (Pakistan): We appreciate your presence in particular, Madam Minister, to preside over this important discussion. We would also like to thank Special Representative Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and the UNICEF representative, Ms. SenGupta, for their briefings.

Pakistan echoes the deep concern expressed in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2025/247), which details more than 41,000 verified grave violations against children in 2024 — representing a shocking 25 per cent increase, compared to the previous year.

In recent years, the world has witnessed an unprecedented and brutal surge in violence against children in armed conflicts, leaving countless young lives maimed, starved, burned, frozen to death or weakened by severe malnutrition. This crisis



is being felt with harrowing intensity in some parts of the world embroiled in devastating armed conflicts.

Most regrettably, children continue to bear the unimaginable cost of war in the occupied Palestinian territories. Both in Gaza and the West Bank, countless children have been killed or scarred for life. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Nigeria and Haiti, grave violations have come to the fore. In the Sudan, Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan, protracted conflicts have robbed generations of their childhood.

The Security Council has the solemn responsibility to address this disturbing state of affairs — to protect children and prevent their suffering, and to ensure that perpetrators are held to account, without any discrimination or political considerations.

Children living under foreign occupation are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses and violence. Previously, the report's most glaring gap had been the omission of certain situations, most notably in Palestine. It took the killing of thousands of Palestinian children in Gaza for the situation to be included in the report last year.

Meanwhile, the plight of children in the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, previously documented, has regrettably been omitted without justification. Generations of Kashmiri children have been condemned to a life of fear, violence and repression under foreign occupation. In fact, their plight has worsened after India's illegal and unilateral measures of 5 August 2019.

The Secretary-General's previous reports rightly urged India to implement measures, including the prohibition of the use of lethal and non-lethal force on children, ending the use of pellet guns, preventing all forms of ill-treatment of children in detention and protecting children from sexual offences. We strongly urge continued reporting on the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, where human rights violations against children are, tragically, routine and ongoing.

In the recent unprovoked and unlawful aggression in May by India against Pakistan, civilian areas were deliberately targeted, resulting in the martyrdom of 15 children. These acts of aggression were carried out in blatant contravention of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. Pakistan calls for a thorough investigation of these grave violations against children and their inclusion in the forthcoming report on children and armed conflict.

We reaffirm our strong support for the Special Representative's mandate, which must remain firmly focused on actual situations where grave violations and atrocities occur with impunity. That is vital for ensuring the integrity and credibility of the children and armed conflict mechanism.

We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to remove references to Pakistan as a so-called situation of concern — a long-overdue correction of an earlier unjustified reflection. As an early signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Pakistan is fully committed to its obligations and has implemented extensive legal, policy and operational measures, including the establishment of a national committee on child protection, the appointment of a national focal person and the endorsement of the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in order to safeguard children. We have already signed a road map with the Special Representative and are working diligently to implement it, further strengthening child protection in line with our national priorities and international commitments.

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize that the children and armed conflict mandate is vital because it documents grave violations against children in conflict. Through its Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, it exposes the facts, drives accountability and compels concrete action to protect those most at risk.



Pakistan will continue to work constructively with fellow members of the Council to advance this collective objective, which will be reinforced if we can, together, redouble our efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts through peaceful means, in accordance with international law and the United Nations Charter. That will be the best guarantee of peace, safety and the protection of children — and of civilians.

**Mr. Bonnafont** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Guyana for having convened this debate on a painful, but critical theme for the Council. I would like to thank Special Representative Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and UNICEF representative Ms. Sheema SenGupta for their briefings. I ask you, Madam President, to thank Sila for her courageous testimony and to convey to her our wishes for a better future.

The grim picture just described is a wake-up call for the international community. As this year marks the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), on the protection of children in armed conflict, the Secretary-General's report (S/2025/247) shows a 25 per cent increase in the number of grave violations verified by the United Nations, compared to the previous year, which had already set a tragic record. The 35 per cent increase in rape and sexual violence, of which girls are the main victims, is shocking. Sadly, the Secretary-General's report demonstrates once again, this year, that in Gaza, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, Lebanon, Haiti and in many other conflicts, children are the primary victims of war.

Faced with that reality, it is the duty of the Council to act and to give child protection the priority it deserves in the implementation of its mandate.

First, strengthening the child protection capacities of our peace operations is one effective tool at our disposal. This must be accompanied by adequate financial, political and operational support. That is the purpose of resolution 2764 (2024), adopted by the Council in December.

Secondly, supporting the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism established by resolution 1612 (2005) is imperative. It is one of the Council's most effective mechanisms. It must be given the necessary means to enable the Secretary-General to establish a comprehensive and objective list of shame. The Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must be able to quickly adopt conclusions, which must be implemented on the ground.

Thirdly, the actions of all entities of the United Nations in conflict situations must be integrated into activities on the ground in favour of child protection, including those focused on protection and reintegration, which are essential. We call on States and all parties concerned to cooperate with the United Nations, in particular with the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF.

Fourthly, we must reaffirm, tirelessly, in our decisions the obligation of all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. The current downward trend, which has been denounced by the Council countless times, is alarming. Not only is that a moral imperative, but the increasing violations of international law have direct and measurable consequences on children, their lives, their physical integrity, their dignity and their rights. Those violations also create desperate generations that start life with a terrible handicap. They undermine the possibility of peace and reconciliation.

Beyond that, France calls on all States to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols, as well as the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court. We call on all States that have not yet done so to endorse the Paris Principles and Commitments, which France launched with UNICEF and which are supported by 115 States. A conference will be held in Paris in 2027 to mark the twentieth anniversary of those Principles.

Finally, we must sanction the perpetrators of serious violations against children. There can be no impunity for those guilty of such abuses. It is certainly the role of the International Criminal Court to play an essential role in that regard. It is their own futures that our societies sacrifice by allowing children to die in war. Many of our countries have learned that cruel lesson. Let us not forget it.

**Mr. Sangjin Kim** (Republic of Korea): I would first like to express my delegation's appreciation to Director Sheema Sen Gupta of UNICEF, for her powerful briefing, and Sila, from Syria for her courage, in sharing her stories with us before the Council. My appreciation also goes to Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, whose exceptional leadership over the past eight years has advanced the children and armed conflict agenda.

This discussion holds special significance for my delegation, as we had the honour of presiding over last year's open debate (see S/PV.9669) and helping to sustain global attention on this vital issue. I am pleased to see that momentum continue today.

Today's discussion is especially timely, as this year marks the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on children and armed conflict and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, both of which have delivered tangible results in advancing the mandate.

Over the decades, we have seen more than 200,000 children released, and more than 40 action plans signed, leading to handover protocols, national child protection laws and stronger accountability mechanisms. Those developments are encouraging, with Iraq, Pakistan and the Philippines expected to be removed from the Secretary-General's report next year.

Yet, despite those achievements, the global rise in geopolitical conflicts presents a far grimmer reality. That is clearly illustrated in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2025/247), which verifies more than 41,000 grave violations — a staggering 25 per cent increase from the previous year — with more than 22,000 children affected. That global trend is further evidenced by the escalating violations against children in conflict-affected regions.

Amid those troubling developments, I wish to highlight two urgent priorities.

First, we must decisively reduce the killing and maiming of children, the most frequently verified and deadliest grave violation, by addressing its primary driver — the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The use of such weapons continues to inflict devastating casualties and turn homes, schools and entire communities into sites of irreversible loss, as vividly illustrated by the testimony of the young briefer from Syria, Sila. It is for that reason that I believe the Secretary-General also highlights, in his most recent report, the urgent need for parties to conflict to refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas, clear explosive ordnance and provide risk education and victim assistance. Having emerged from the devastation of war, Korea is uniquely positioned to understand the long-lasting consequences of explosive remnants on both children and communities. That is why the Republic of Korea, as an early endorser and consistent supporter of the political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas, remains firmly committed to reducing the impact of such weapons on children by supporting data collection, victim assistance and international cooperation. As part of those efforts, the Republic of Korea is partnering with UNICEF to deliver mine risk education and victim support in Myanmar with \$6.8 million, and contributing \$6 million through the Mine Action Service to protect refugee children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That support will continue.

Secondly, we must confront the surge in sexual violence against children by strengthening accountability and advancing survivor-centered action. In just one year, verified cases rose by an alarming 35 per cent, though the actual scale is likely far greater, as sexual violence remains grossly underreported owing to stigma, the fear of retaliation and the lack of safe reporting channels. Survivors endure not only trauma and reprisal, but also serious gaps in access to medical and legal support. Children born of rape face even deeper marginalization, often denied legal identity and rejected by both families, growing up as painful reminders of violence. To prevent the recurrence of such tragedies, we must fight impunity. In line with resolution 1882 (2009), we strongly support the Secretary-General's call for the establishment of time-bound action plans to end and prevent sexual violence in affected countries. At the same time, the ongoing prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo represents tangible progress, and other conflict-affected States must draw on that example to strengthen accountability. Moreover, listening to and empowering survivors must be the starting point of any survivor-centred response, from which meaningful healing, justice and prevention can truly begin. Recognizing that, the Republic of Korea has placed particular emphasis on supporting survivor-centred responses, contributing \$8.6 million to prevent gender-based violence and assist survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That includes support for the establishment of integrated multisectoral service centres, which provide medical, legal and psychosocial services under one roof.

The Republic of Korea speaks today not only as a Security Council member, but as a nation forged from war. We know from experience that protecting children is not just a moral imperative; it is an investment in lasting peace and in our shared future. We will continue to work in solidarity with the United Nations and all Member States, taking tangible steps to better protect children from the scourge of armed conflict.

**Mr. Alfaro de Alba** (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome your participation, Madam President, as you preside over our Council meeting today, and we would like to congratulate the delegation of Guyana on its admirable steering of the Council presidency this month and on coordinating the holding of this vitally important open debate.

Allow me to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, for her presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/247), in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005), a responsibility that she has fulfilled in a very moving way. We would also like to thank Ms. Sheema SenGupta, UNICEF Director of Child Protection and Migration, and the representative of civil society. We thank them all for their valuable contributions, which were presented in a most convincing manner.

I appear before the Council today with a profound sense of urgency and responsibility. Talking about children in conflict situations is not just a matter of debating figures or strategies. It is to confront head-on the collective failure to protect those who are most vulnerable to and least responsible for the errors of humanity — or of the lack thereof. We are talking about voices that were extinguished very early, about school satchels abandoned amid debris, empty desks, horrendous amputations and childhoods that were stolen before they even began.

In the most recent report of the Secretary-General, the magnitude of the tragedy is clear. The year 2024 witnessed unprecedented levels of violence against children in armed conflict. More than 41,000 serious violations have been recorded, a figure that shows an alarming escalation in the brutality of armed clashes. Children are not just trapped in the epicentre of those crises; they are deliberately being used as instruments of war. They are abducted, recruited by armed groups and systematically submitted to sexual, physical and psychological violations.

In Gaza, children have been buried under the rubble of their own houses. More than 1,200 children have died, many of them in the arms of parents who were unable to find refuge in time. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is reported that more than 2,300 children have been forcibly recruited, armed with rifles bigger and heavier than they are and sent out to kill. Children are obliged to commit irreparable acts, transforming their playful children's voices into war cries. In the Sudan, girls have cruelly fallen victim to an indescribable barbarism, subjected to innumerable cases of sexual violence, many of them silenced by fear, shame and the impunity that surrounds them. In Ukraine, the war continues to devastate schools and hospitals, depriving girls and boys of their inalienable right to education. And at the same time, many young children are forcibly displaced to areas that are not under the control of their country, and some of them may never return — not because they chose that path, but because of the cruel logic of a war that does not even forgive innocence and whose victims do not have the ability to understand what is happening.

Allow me to particularly focus on two contexts that concern us directly because of their geographical proximity to us and our commitment to the region. In Haiti, institutional collapse and the violence of the gangs have engulfed children in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. More than 2.85 million children are facing acute food insecurity. More than 500,000 have been displaced, and at least 280 schools have closed, owing to armed threats. In that respect, Panama would insist that the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti and the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti should give priority to protecting children and closely coordinate with UNICEF and other humanitarian actors. In Colombia, although we recognize the progress that has been made by the Government under the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, there is still forced recruitment in rural and border areas by armed dissidents. According to the Secretary-General's report, approximately 450 children have been linked to armed groups, although it is feared that the real figures are even more alarming. That situation in our neighbouring country underscores the urgent need to broaden the social integration programmes with a territorial focus on gender and ethnicity in order to ensure the recovery and protection of the affected children, providing them with the necessary tools to rebuild their future.

From that perspective, Panama firmly believes that child protection must be at the heart of the peace architecture. That is why we propose the inclusion of mandatory child protection clauses in all the Security Council peacekeeping mandates, with psychosocial and childcare experts on staff. We also need to extend the capacity of the monitoring mechanism and the presentation of reports, facilitating real-time access to data, including in areas controlled by non-State actors, using satellite technology and alliances with local organizations. It is also necessary to increase funding for preventing child recruitment through educational, community resilience and family support programmes, particularly in contexts of forced displacement and structural poverty.

We would also like to take this opportunity to stress that the denial of humanitarian access, whether it be through bureaucratic obstacles, deliberate attacks on aid convoys or the use of starvation or the lack of other goods as a weapon of war, is not only morally indefensible, but also legally reprehensible. We call upon Member States to implement solid national laws, in line with resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 2427 (2018) and 2764 (2025), given that, in the absence of a national legal framework, international norms are at risk of remaining mere aspirations.

Children do not choose war. We must not allow the world to ignore them and to continue to choose silence. This debate is a reminder that, while the suffering of children in armed conflict is indeed heartbreaking, our capacity for collective action can change the course of their lives for the better. Panama, as a nation of peace and as a convinced promoter of multilateralism, reiterates its firm commitment to the

protection of children, because as long as there is one single child trapped in war, peace will remain an empty promise.

**Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria): We thank Guyana for convening this open debate, and we appreciate the fact that you, Your Excellency Dr. Vindhya Vasini Persaud, Minister of Human Resources and Social Security, are presiding over this important meeting. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Director of Child Protection and Migration of UNICEF for their presentations. We commend UNICEF for its efforts. We commend the efforts undertaken by that organization in New York but, more importantly, in the field to protect children all over the world, without exception.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is mandated to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict. That Office is mandated to foster international cooperation to improve their protection. That Office should have served as a powerful voice for children in armed conflict.

My colleagues around this table described at length the situation of innocent children caught in armed conflict all over the world. I wish to stress specifically the plight of Palestinian children. The report (S/2025/247) before us explicitly highlighted Israel as responsible for the highest levels of grave violations in 2024. Despite the dire and catastrophic situation in Gaza, the response of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has been strikingly insufficient, as it has issued remarkably few public statements regarding the situation of children in Gaza; precisely two were issued this year. How can we ignore the 7,188 verified grave violations attributed to Israeli forces? And that figure includes more than 2,000 verified cases of killing and maiming. How can we ignore that figure, which includes more than 500 verified attacks on schools and 148 reported attacks on hospitals? Those figures include more than 5,000 verified cases of denied humanitarian assistance in the West Bank and 2,263 in Gaza alone. Those are only the violations verified by the Office; for sure, the reality is far worse.

The Office's statements fall critically short of the decisive and sustained condemnation warranted by the immense scale of the crisis. That very limited public engagement starkly contrasts with the rapidly deteriorating reality on the ground, in which Palestinian children's right to life is being denied every single moment in Gaza. The entire humanitarian community, especially UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, has repeatedly reported on the dire situation in Gaza, highlighting the more than 50,000 children reported dead or injured in the past 18 months, including the more than 1,300 reported killed and the 3,800 reported injured since the breach of the ceasefire in March. Five thousand children aged six months to five years were diagnosed with acute malnutrition in May — a nearly 50 per cent increase from April and a 150 per cent increase from February — with severe acute malnutrition cases surging by 146 per cent since February. Half of the 2 million internally displaced people in Gaza are children. How can we ignore those figures? How can we ignore those children? That is a man-made crisis.

In the light of those escalating atrocities and the urgent need for robust advocacy, we must inquire into the following: What tangible effort is the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict undertaking to alleviate the suffering of the children in Gaza? How is the Office engaging with all parties to the conflict, particularly regarding the widespread and catastrophic denial of humanitarian assistance? That is especially pertinent given that the Special Representative's Office recently launched the Guidance Note on the Denial of Humanitarian Access to Children.



The Office has not sent a representative to visit Gaza since the outbreak of the conflict, 18 months ago. Moreover, it has only issued very limited public statements and condemnations of what is happening before our eyes in Gaza, undermining the very principle of proactive engagement that we expected from the Office in fulfilment of its critical mandate. The protection of children in conflict demands a more vigorous and vocal response to the unparalleled crisis in Gaza. And the innocent children in Gaza deserve immediate, effective protection and accountability for those perpetrating these abhorrent violations.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We appreciate the organization of today's debate and thank the briefers for their contributions to the discussion.

Year after year, the Secretary-General's reports on the issue of children indicate an increase in the number of grave violations against children: in 2024, that figure rose yet again by 25 per cent. Over the past two years, a key factor in this negative trend has been the growing number of child casualties resulting from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas reached at the beginning of the year gave us faint hope for the possibility of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. However, shortly thereafter, the region again descended into chaos, and the humanitarian crisis hit new lows. Today, more than 93 per cent of children in Gaza — some 930,000 people — are on the brink of starvation. Ninety-five per cent of schools have been damaged or destroyed, and there are virtually no hospitals left standing.

The situation is not much better in the West Bank. That is evidenced by the data provided in the Secretary-General most recent report (S/2025/247). In 2024, 3,688 violations were documented in that territory, including instances of murder and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals and denials of humanitarian access. And that only accounts for instances verified according to established methodology.

Against that backdrop, in early June, the Council once again failed to adopt a resolution to facilitate an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, the release of all hostages and the lifting of the humanitarian blockade of Gaza (see S/PV.9929). Such developments raise doubts about the real commitment of all Security Council members to the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

Since the beginning of the year, the situation has deteriorated in other regions as well. As is often the case, the root of the problem lies not in an insufficient number of mechanisms or declarative statements, but in the implementation of practical solutions, with States playing a leading role. That is precisely why the theme of children and armed conflict, more than any other issue, requires intergovernmental cooperation and must, under no circumstances, be politicized.

However, the practices of the Council and its mechanisms to assist children have not proven to be paragons of impartiality. For example, we continue to see unverified figures in the report concerning the number of children affected in Ukraine. The source of such figures is the same notorious mission under the control of Kyiv, namely the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The mission trusts but does not verify the figures provided to it by the Ukrainian side. Moreover, that information is portrayed in such a way that it is impossible to verify it. It is not enough to simply convey anonymous statistical data to States. The handover of such information, in and of itself, cannot help to determine whether a violation has occurred, nor can it provide for a proper investigation into all the circumstances surrounding it.

The Council itself had an opportunity to redress this situation when we proposed that the Council become part of the process of reuniting children who lost ties with



their relatives as a result of the Ukrainian crisis. However, the European delegations obstructed the adoption of the relevant presidential statement. They could not summon the strength to admit that for a number of years they had been shamelessly deceiving the international community by claiming that there were tens of thousands of abducted children. We proposed that a simple fact be established in the statement: Ukraine provided Russia with a list of 339 children allegedly held on our territory, and we expressed our willingness to examine it and cooperate with Kyiv on this matter. This action-oriented step offered a real opportunity for substantive dialogue, but it was blocked. We continue to hear about the same 20,000 allegedly abducted Ukrainian children — both from media outlets and from a number of delegations. It seems that for a number of Council members, these statements are worth more than the real fates of children, about whom they appear to be absolutely indifferent.

Nevertheless, we will continue to take practical measures to reunite children with their families, regardless of the circumstances. Work along those lines started long before that and has been carried out by the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation. Those efforts resulted in 101 children returning to Ukraine, and 22 children to Russia. A new list is already under consideration by the relevant Russian bodies.

We are witnessing a continuous underestimation of the number of Russian child victims in the Secretary-General's report. As a result, the Security Council is receiving a distorted depiction of the situation. For example, among the serious violations against children, the report identifies murder and maiming as the most common, and the lion's share of children are killed or maimed as a result of the use of explosive munitions. However, one will not find any information in the report that Ukraine regularly resorts to that practice.

In 2024, Russia conducted mine clearance on approximately 3,200 hectares of territory and discovered 170,655 explosive devices. These vast areas were literally littered with mines, which Kyiv needed to destroy, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Moreover, many of the mines discovered are prohibited by the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its Amended Protocol II.

In order to reduce the risks associated with mine contamination for the sake of children, Russian educational institutions are holding educational discussions to tell children about the dangers of mines. In addition, programmes are being developed and introduced to raise awareness among children of the mine threat and to reduce the risk linked to explosive devices, with a special emphasis on the danger posed by booby traps, which can be indistinguishable from children's toys. Despite the ban on their use, under Article II of the aforementioned Protocol, we regularly encounter the use of such devices by Ukraine.

In implementing its approaches to countering the mine threat, Russia is guided by the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Amended Protocol II and Protocol V. We believe it is necessary to take steps to universalize those documents in order to ensure the safety of the civilian population and normalize life in the post-conflict period.

However, mine contamination is just one of many threats to Russian children posed by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Grave violations are being perpetrated by Ukraine on an almost daily basis. Every week, we receive reports of new shockingly brutal cases. For example, from 9 June through 15 June alone, we documented the following violations. In Borisovka, Belgorod Oblast, a 2-year-old child was killed and his grandmother and another civilian were injured as a result of a drone strike on an apartment building. In Donetsk, six teenagers were injured as a result of a drone

detonation in the courtyard of a residential building. A drone raid on the village of Marino in Kursk Oblast injured three more children. As a result of a drone falling in Belgorod an 8-year-old boy was gravely injured. As a result of a drone attack on Kremennaya in the Luhansk People's Republic, a 17-year-old teenager was wounded.

In 2024, the period covered by the report concerning us today, 347 children were killed or maimed as a result of the actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine — 296 minors were wounded, and 51 children were killed. The youngest of those killed was four months old. Fifty-five children were affected by drone strikes — 44 were wounded and 11 were killed. Drones targeted them when they were in cars traveling with their parents, in residential buildings and on playgrounds. Ukrainian drone operators are hunting civilians and vehicles.

However, Council members will not find those figures in the Secretary-General's report, in which only four child deaths are attributed to Ukraine. For several years in a row, we have not found the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the blacklist of violators, and that is despite the fact that even with obviously underestimated statistics, it is clear that violations against children are neither sporadic nor accidental.

The violations are committed under similar circumstances and in violation of international humanitarian law, namely, during the shelling of Russian territories which have no legitimate military targets. The killings and maimings are the result of attacks that directly target civilians and civilian objects. In the most egregious cases, it is precisely children that are being targeted. The attacks are planned, regular and approved by the command structure.

So what, if I may ask, is preventing the Secretary-General from drawing the conclusion that Ukraine's actions constitute a recurring pattern of behaviour and listing the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the appendix to his report?

The process of listing and delisting in annexes to the report needs to be independent and impartial. It also needs to be based on verifiable evidence and depoliticized. That is a precondition for the maintenance of trust in the international mechanism. So far, we have not seen that happening.

At the same time, we pay tribute to the rank-and-file United Nations staff, namely those people who are working to alleviate the plight of children on the ground by delivering assistance to them or engaging in negotiations with members of armed groups, thereby facilitating the reintegration of victims of violations into society.

**Ms. Swallow** (Sierra Leone): I welcome and thank you, Ms. Vindhya Persaud, Minister of Human Services and Social Security of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, for presiding over this important open debate. I also thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and Ms. Sheema Sen Gupta, Director of Child Protection and Migration at UNICEF, for their comprehensive briefings and insightful recommendations. We are particularly grateful to Ms. Sila for her courageous personal testimony which deeply moved us all.

At the outset, Sierra Leone commends the resilience and dedication of the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and their respective country task forces implementing the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on children in armed conflict, as well as broader child protection efforts in country situations.

For more than two decades, the Security Council has, through successive resolutions, made significant strides in recognizing the grave impact of armed conflict on children, especially girls, children with disabilities and those from Indigenous communities.

That recognition is increasingly relevant in the face of unprecedented breaches of international humanitarian law; widespread attacks on civilians and civilian

infrastructure, including schools; alarming levels of food and water insecurity; and the devastating effects of climate change, all of which disproportionately affect children.

As we approach the eightieth anniversary of the United Nations and reflect on our shared vision for a peaceful and prosperous future, we must redouble our efforts to resolve current conflicts and prevent a future in which children are denied the chance to live, or in which children are maimed by weapons of war or are left bearing the invisible scars of trauma.

In particular, Sierra Leone expresses deep concern over the appalling humanitarian situation confronting children in Gaza. The protracted collective punishment and hostilities have inflicted unbearable suffering on the most innocent and vulnerable — children who are being killed, maimed, displaced and left without access to basic services such as food, water, shelter and education. We are particularly alarmed by credible reports of widespread trauma with entire generations now bearing the scars of relentless violence.

The denial of humanitarian access exacerbates that dire reality. We reiterate the call for strict adherence to international humanitarian law, particularly the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. We urge all parties to prioritize the protection of children to allow unfettered humanitarian assistance and to recommit to peace efforts that uphold the dignity and rights of every child in Gaza.

In the light of the foregoing, Sierra Leone wishes to highlight the following key points.

First, echoing the sentiments expressed this morning at the press stakeout, peace remains the best protection for children. Sierra Leone strongly condemns all violations of international humanitarian law, particularly those that target or harm children. We urge all parties to conflict to uphold their obligations under international law, engage in ceasefire agreements in good faith and commit to inclusive and sustainable peace processes. We further call on all parties to immediately release children from their ranks and to engage constructively with the United Nations in the signing and implementation of action plans. Listing should be seen not as punitive but as a vital tool for engagement and reform. Reintegration is key. Children affected by conflict must be given opportunities to heal and reclaim their childhood, including through education. On education, we particularly urge the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to lift the suspension on girls' education. Sierra Leone reiterates the call by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for sustained political and financial support for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, which must be sustainable, nationally owned and locally driven.

Secondly, the primary responsibility for child protection lies with States. While the United Nations and regional organizations play a critical complementary role, it is States, especially those exercising territorial control, that must ensure safe, unhindered humanitarian access and the protection of civilians. We strongly condemn all attacks on humanitarian personnel and other protected persons. We welcome the publication of *Denial of Humanitarian Access to Children: A Guidance Note for the Children and Armed Conflict Agenda* by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF, and we encourage all authorities and armed groups to grant unimpeded access to humanitarian actors. Sierra Leone also acknowledges and commends States that have adopted national, legal and institutional frameworks for child protection, especially those that empower community leaders, religious figures and civil society actors.

That brings us to our third point: accountability. Justice must be pursued. Where States hold perpetrators accountable for grave violations, they create a culture of deterrence. We commend efforts by the Central African Republic, the

Democratic Republic of the Congo and Colombia to pursue national investigations and prosecutions. We also reaffirm our strong support for the International Criminal Court and the Office of the Prosecutor, and we call for continued prosecution of crimes involving grave violations against children, especially conflict-related sexual violence.

Fourthly, we emphasize the importance of integrating child protection into the mandates of all United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions. We urgently call for the inclusion of dedicated child protection advisers and the provision of comprehensive predeployment in mission and field-based training to all uniformed personnel. Child protection must be a core pillar, not an afterthought, in peace and security mandates.

Fifthly and finally, we must address the enduring legacies of war. One of the leading causes of injury and death among children in conflict zones is the use of explosive ordnance and remnants of war. Those weapons inflict indiscriminate and long-lasting harm. We commend demining efforts and call for the prioritization of mine clearance, risk education and other preventive measures. Sierra Leone remains committed to those goals, as reflected in our endorsement of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We also reaffirm our commitment to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Convention on Cluster Munitions and caution against any regression.

In conclusion, Sierra Leone expresses its strong support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. We also endorse the Prove It Matters campaign, recognizing the critical need to preserve and strengthen child protection capacity in peacebuilding and security sector reform processes. On the occasion of the Day of the African Child on 16 June, Sierra Leone endorsed the call of the African Union's Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts for increased domestic investment in child protection, education and health. As was rightly stated, we must transform commitment into action, ensuring that every child in Africa, regardless of their circumstances, grows up in a safe, dignified and nurturing environment.

**Mr. Fu Cong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome Minister Persaud to New York as she presides over this open debate. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and Director SenGupta for their briefings. I have listened carefully to the statement by the civil society representative.

Children are the most innocent and vulnerable group in armed conflicts. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2025/247), more than 41,000 grave violations against children in conflict zones were verified by the United Nations last year, a sharp increase of 25 per cent compared to the previous year. Nearly 12,000 children were killed or maimed, marking an unprecedented level of violence inflicted on children by armed conflicts around the world.

As we speak, children in Gaza are still suffering amid war and hunger, with more than 17,000 young lives cruelly taken. In Haiti, children are mired in desperate straits as violence runs rampant, with particular grave issues, such as the recruitment and use of child soldiers by gangs and sexual violence. The Secretary-General's report, responding to the strong calls of the international community, has listed perpetrators of grave violations against children in Gaza, Haiti and other regions. China welcomes that move. We support the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in promptly reviewing violations against children in those regions and taking protective actions accordingly.

Children are the hope and future of humankind. Protecting their safety is our shared responsibility. The international community must take concrete measures to create an environment conducive to the healthy and safe development of children. In that connection, I wish to make four points.

First, promoting ceasefires and ending hostilities is an urgent priority. China appreciates the efforts of the United Nations in providing protection to more than 16,000 children affected by armed conflict last year. However, as long as the flames of war continue to burn, more children will remain at risk. The international community must step up its mediation efforts to bring an early end to conflicts in regions such as the Middle East, the Sudan and Ukraine and urge all parties concerned to resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiation. We must firmly reject unilateral actions that deliberately provoke confrontation and create chaos and avoid external interference that fuels conflict and exacerbates tensions.

Secondly, increasing humanitarian assistance is a pressing necessity. Actions such as defunding and imposing a blockade on supplies exacerbate food shortages and the spread of disease, seriously violating children's fundamental right to survival. Israel should immediately lift the blockade and fully restore humanitarian access to Gaza. We call on the international community, especially traditional donors, to scale up humanitarian support for conflict regions and to fulfil their funding commitments. At the same time, we encourage United Nations humanitarian agencies to explore innovative fundraising options in order to continuously enhance the reach, effectiveness and equity of humanitarian operations.

Thirdly, strengthening the international rule of law is the fundamental way forward. The Council must make effective use of the toolbox for child protection through coordination to ensure accountability for grave violations. All parties must strictly adhere to the basic principles of international humanitarian law. Civilian facilities, such as schools and hospitals, are vital to children's education and healthy development and must never be targeted in conflict. We call on the only Member State that has yet to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so as soon as possible and take concrete actions to protect the legitimate rights of children.

Fourthly, advancing sustainable development is a long-term solution. Development is a solid foundation for peace, while underdevelopment is a key root cause of conflict. The international community should assist conflict-affected countries in eradicating poverty, democratizing education and improving healthcare, thereby strengthening social protection and independent development capacities and uprooting violence. The United Nations should prioritize support for development through mechanisms and resources, in order to create favourable conditions for the development of children.

Twenty years ago, the Council adopted resolution 1612 (2005) and established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, providing an important platform for better protection of children in conflict. China congratulates Greece on assuming the chairmanship of the Working Group and looks forward to continued improvement in its working methods with a balanced approach to reviewing country-specific reports and negotiating conclusions. We appreciate the contributions of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and will continue to support her work. China will work tirelessly with the international community to eliminate conflicts and promote and protect the rights of children.

**Ms. Shea** (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and Director Sheema SenGupta for their briefings. And I want to thank Sila for sharing her compelling words with us.

This year's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2025/247) provides a sobering snapshot of the devastating impact of armed conflict on children. In 2024,



the United Nations reported the highest number of violations since the establishment of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. That includes a dramatic increase in the number of cases of sexual violence. That stark reality serves as a poignant reminder of the urgency and necessity of strengthening the international community's child protection capacities and of the crucial need for all parties to conflict to respect their international obligations.

As a result of escalating gang violence, Haiti was reported as one of the countries with the greatest number of violations and abuses against children. A large majority of those violations were committed by the Viv Ansanm coalition. We continue to condemn Viv Ansanm's actions and support their inclusion, for the first time, in the annex to the Secretary-General's report. In May, the United States designated Viv Ansanm as a foreign terrorist organization. We will continue to support efforts to promote accountability, and we intend also to nominate the group for listing in the United Nations sanctions regime concerning Haiti.

In the Sudan, growing instability threatens the safety and well-being of children. Even with the Council's extension of the sanctions regime concerning the Sudan earlier this year, further steps must be taken to resolve restrictions on humanitarian aid, and to address persistent human rights violations and mass displacement.

Several colleagues have raised the tragic situation faced by children in Gaza. It is important to remember that Israel has the right to defend itself and has taken numerous measures to limit harm to civilians and address humanitarian needs. While the loss of civilian life in Gaza is tragic, the responsibility for this conflict rests with Hamas, which could stop the fighting today by freeing the hostages and agreeing to the ceasefire terms already accepted by Israel. On 7 October 2023, Hamas brutally massacred 1,200 people, including 40 children. Among them were siblings Ariel and Kfir Bibas, then only four years and nine months old, respectively. Hamas murdered the Bibas children and then paraded their coffins through the streets. This terrorist organization continues to use civilians, including children, as human shields and refuses to accept a ceasefire that would bring calm to Gaza. At the same time, Hamas aims to prevent the delivery of life-saving aid, murdering eight innocent Palestinians working on behalf of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation on 11 June. We strongly condemn the actions of Hamas and regret that the report does not highlight the full scale of its abuses.

In this fourth year of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the continued occupation by Russian forces, we highlight the plight of children caught in the crossfire. Russian armed forces and affiliated groups continue to kill and maim children, with many facing injuries or death from explosive weapons. We call on both sides to negotiate an end to the war and to safeguard humanitarian access in all occupied areas. We also acknowledge the continued search for the remaining children forcibly transferred or deported by the Russian armed forces and the Russian authorities, as verified by the Secretary-General's report last year (S/2024/384). They must be reunited with their families and safely returned to Ukrainian-controlled territory.

The children of the Democratic Republic of the Congo also continue to face mounting violence and instability. We call on the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to revitalize efforts to reduce violations against children, including unlawful child recruitment, abduction and all other violence against children. We encourage all parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to prioritize the well-being and safety of children.

There are some bright spots. We commend the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force for their implementation of an action plan and their clear improvements in protecting children, as described in the report. Likewise, we commend Iraq, Pakistan and the Philippines for their complete delisting from the Secretary-General's report. We continue to encourage the entities named in the



report to work on action plans with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and to work towards delisting.

Children around the world deserve to feel safe, receive an education and have a future. When we take steps to protect children, we are safeguarding our collective future and helping to end enduring conflicts. We must do better.

**Mr. Dhakkar** (Somalia): At the outset, our delegation expresses our sincere gratitude to the Guyanese presidency for convening this important open debate. We have carefully listened to the statements delivered by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and Director SenGupta. To the child briefer, Sila, we express our gratitude for her brave and courageous testimony today. We take note of the Secretary-General's report (S/2025/247), which casts a sobering light on the state of our world's children.

Somalia is profoundly alarmed by the rising grave violations against children worldwide. We are especially compelled to speak of Gaza, where the suffering of children unfolds on a heartbreaking scale. Thousands have been killed, wounded or orphaned amid unending hostilities. The destruction of homes, classrooms and clinics has left a generation gripped by fear and deprived of hope. The plight of Gaza's children is a stark testament to the urgent need for humanitarian access, the protection of all civilians and the defence of fundamental rights, regardless of circumstance or context. Such acts cannot and must not be met with deadening silence.

We also note with grave concern the crises in the occupied Palestinian territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and elsewhere. All children, wherever they are born, whatever their circumstances, deserve protection, dignity and peace. Our delegation fully endorses the Secretary-General's call for strict adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In that spirit, Somalia proposes three decisive measures for the international community.

First, we propose the creation of a dedicated global fund to support comprehensive reintegration programmes for affected children.

Secondly, we recommend the provision of enhanced technical and financial resources to strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Thirdly, we advocate the forging of closer coordination among the United Nations, regional bodies and Member States so as to ensure that our collective efforts are coherent, effective and unwavering.

In conclusion, Somalia remains steadfast in its commitment to the protection of children, as evidenced by our dedicated units, rigorous protocols and humane handover procedures. Yet we must acknowledge, with humility and clarity, that true protection for children can never be achieved while conflict endures. It is only by striving to end wars and by investing earnestly in the prevention of new ones that we can hope to guarantee a world where no child is left to bear the wounds of war and where every child can grow in safety, dignity and hope.

**Ms. Lassen** (Denmark): Denmark commends Guyana for organizing this critical debate and you, Madam Minister, for your presence and commitment to shining a light on this darkest, most insidious aspect of conflict. Let me also thank Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and UNICEF Director SenGupta for their briefings. But most of all, I wish to thank Sila for her powerful and courageous testimony. Her unfiltered message is what the Council needs to hear and to heed.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2025/247) is brutally clear. Grave violations against children are rampant, are going unpunished and are destroying lives. Behind every figure is a child whose childhood has been robbed and whose future has been

derailed. Sila provided us with some very concrete and shocking examples of that. Sila talked about her childhood in Syria, but across the globe, children continue to bear the brunt of conflicts not of their making — from the unlawful deportations of Ukrainian children by the Russian Federation to the continued recruitment and use of children by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, from attacks on schools and hospitals in Myanmar and the Sudan to sexual violence in Nigeria and Haiti. No war and no region have been spared from this scourge. The plight of children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, who continue to suffer the highest number of grave violations, is deeply troubling — most notably in Gaza, which UNICEF has called “the most dangerous place in the world to be a child”.

Against that dire backdrop, allow me to focus on three critical areas for action.

First, upholding accountability and international law is non-negotiable. The protection of children depends on the clear and consistent enforcement of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. States and non-State actors alike must be held responsible for violations. Impunity must end. Only through credible investigations and justice can we break the cycle of abuse and send a strong message that violations against children will not be tolerated. We call on all Member States to uphold their obligations under international law and to ratify and implement all relevant instruments. That includes the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Secondly, to protect children in times of conflict, we need to use every tool at our disposal. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the Council’s Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict can and should play a crucial role. Denmark was honoured to play our part in establishing these bodies in 2005. We remain just as committed to their effective functioning today. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, in particular, remains the cornerstone of efforts to document abuses, identify perpetrators and facilitate timely responses. But it requires resources, access and political support. That is our shared responsibility.

Thirdly, addressing the gendered impact of grave violations is essential. Violations against children in armed conflict have distinct and profound effects on girls and boys. Sexual and gender-based violence, disproportionately inflicted upon girls, leaves long-lasting trauma, while boys face recruitment and targeted killings. These children have experienced horrors and harm that no child should ever suffer. Denmark urges that all monitoring, prevention and response efforts be designed through a lens that takes those gendered patterns into account.

In closing, we must never accept that grave violations against children are somehow an inevitable outcome of conflict. That is not the case. Children neither create nor control conflict. They are victims and they deserve protection. Children must never pay the price of war.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I welcome Guyana presiding over this important meeting. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and Ms. SenGupta for briefing us today. I also thank Sila for her powerful testimony.

The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting Syrians as they rebuild after years of suffering, with an inclusive transition that reflects a wide range of voices, including that of Syria’s youth.

I will make three points today in that regard.

First, the United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the worsening situation for children in conflicts around the world. The Secretary-General’s report (S/2025/247) highlights a shocking 25 per cent increase in grave violations against children in the past year. We call on all parties to armed conflict to immediately end and prevent

grave violations against children. Perpetrators need to be held to account. We also echo the Secretary-General's call for all listed parties to engage with the United Nations to develop and implement action plans to end and prevent grave violations.

Secondly, as we have heard today, cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children have increased by over a third in the past year. In the Sudan, children as young as one are reportedly subject to sexual violence. The United Kingdom unequivocally condemns sexual violence against children and has championed the rights of child survivors and rallied global action through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

Thirdly, in too many conflicts, children are bearing the brunt of violence. The conflict in the occupied Palestinian territories is having a catastrophic impact on children, with thousands killed and maimed as a result of Israeli military action. Palestinians, desperate to feed their families, have been killed as they try to reach the few aid sites permitted by Israel. That is unacceptable. We call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law to protect children and urgently lift restrictions to enable aid to enter Gaza at scale. Israeli children have also suffered as a result of Hamas's despicable crimes, with children killed and taken hostage on 7 October. The United Kingdom repeats its call for an immediate ceasefire and the release of all remaining hostages. And Russia continues to kill and maim children and attack schools and hospitals in its illegal war in Ukraine. We call on Russia to cease this unprovoked war and return forcibly deported children to Ukraine.

The United Kingdom remains steadfast in its commitment to the children and armed conflict mandate and to ending grave violations against children. We need to do more to protect children. They are the next generation of leaders and peacebuilders. They are our future.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): We welcome Guyana's convening of this timely debate, and we commend you, Madam Minister, for demonstrating your commitment to this topic.

I join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter. We thank her for her commitment and for the solemn dedication to children that she has displayed over the years. Her passionate appeal to us today is a very simple demonstration that she cares. We also thank the representative of UNICEF, Ms. SenGupta, for her briefing, and of course, we also thank civil society briefer Sila for sharing her experience and personal mission.

Tomorrow, we will be commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. What drove our grandfathers and fathers, who fought evil during the Second World War and met in San Francisco, was a determination "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". They wanted their children to live in a more peaceful and better world. And how are we, their children, living up to that guiding principle of the United Nations Charter? Do we still share our grandmothers' determination? Are we determined to save young generations from the pains of wars?

From what we read in this year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2025/247), and from what we have heard today, it seems that we are not. With yet another year in which the number of violations was the highest ever recorded, alarm bells should be ringing everywhere. We deplore the level and intensity of grave violations against children by both State actors and non-State armed groups. We strongly condemn the systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the Sudan, the high numbers of children recruited by armed groups and gangs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti, and the precarious situation of the Ukrainian children forcibly transferred and deported to Russia. We further condemn the continuing attacks on schools and hospitals, such as the attack

on a school in Myanmar last month. And we cannot witness in deafening silence, as my neighbour said, the starving orphans wandering around Gaza, wishing to join their parents and siblings in the other world. All that must stop. This is not the world we want to live in.

I have said it before, and I will say it again. The reports that we receive from the United Nations system, including the report on children and armed conflict, are not for our own information. They are not here for our aimless debates. And they are definitely not here for us to cherry-pick the data that fits our own agenda. The privilege of being briefed comes with the responsibility to act, in accordance with the responsibilities enshrined in the Charter and using the tools at our disposal.

As responsible members of the Council, we need to address all violations against children in every situation, one by one. I cannot see us not sharing the same resolve to prevent those crimes. We need to show determination in opposing impunity for those horrible crimes and to support and instruct international judicial institutions, including the International Criminal Court, accordingly. We need to insist, in the strongest terms and using the tools at our disposal, on enforcing respect for international humanitarian law. The erosion of respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law is a major problem today. The rules of war need to be respected. Finally, we need to show greater resolve to restore peace and security to conflict situations.

The nature of society can be observed through the lens of how it deals with the most vulnerable. Likewise, the state of the world can be judged through the lens of how successfully it protects children caught in armed conflict. We need to do better.

**The President:** I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. The flashing light on the microphone will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after three minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

**Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan):** Kazakhstan commends Guyana for organizing this timely open debate on children and armed conflict, as we approach the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005).

We convey our heartfelt appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Director Sheema SenGupta and the civil society representative for their thorough briefings and insights on enhancing our joint efforts to safeguard children in armed conflicts. We also applaud the coordinated and tireless efforts of the team of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and other United Nations entities in their endeavour to end grave violations against children.

The alarming findings in the Secretary-General's report (S/2025/247), detailing an unprecedented surge in grave violations against children in 2024, demand our urgent and collective attention. We are deeply disturbed by the rampant killing and maiming of children, often due to the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which continues to inflict the devastating impact of conflict on our most vulnerable. It is imperative that explosive ordnance clearance, risk education and victim assistance be adequately prioritized and funded. We must also address the sharp rise in sexual violence, which is, alarmingly, used as a tactic of war. The underreporting of those crimes, due to stigma and a lack of access to justice, is a significant concern.

Kazakhstan firmly believes that effective strategies to end and prevent violations against children must be rooted in upholding international law. We therefore invite all Member States to join the global initiative to galvanize political commitment to

international humanitarian law. We also call on all parties to conflict to engage with the United Nations to adopt concrete and time-bound action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children. The progress made on releasing children from armed groups and vacating schools used militarily in several countries demonstrates that positive change is possible through sustained engagement and commitment.

Lastly, children who lack education and opportunities are highly vulnerable to exploitation. To prevent grave violations, we must prioritize prevention through increased investment in their overall development and by addressing their socioeconomic needs. Furthermore, strengthening reintegration and rehabilitation programmes is crucial to help child victims of armed conflict successfully rejoin and thrive in their communities. Our experience shows the viability of that practice.

Let us work together to strengthen prevention measures and ensure that budget cuts do not come at the expense of child protection. The future of our world depends on the safety and well-being of its children.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this debate under your presidency. I also thank the speakers for their statements.

Switzerland is deeply concerned about the alarming increase in grave violations committed against children in armed conflicts. That trend is unacceptable, and it is our collective responsibility to reverse it.

I would like to reiterate three key messages in that regard.

First, the protection of children is non-negotiable. Yet, owing to the intensity and urbanization of conflicts and the use of explosive weapons, mines and submunitions — as in the Sudan, Ukraine, the occupied Palestinian territory and Lebanon, for instance — an unprecedented number of children have been injured or killed. We must speak with one voice in calling for strict respect for international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law — in particular, the principles of distinction and proportionality. In that regard, it is imperative to universalize and implement the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The protection of children must be at the centre of humanitarian demining efforts and risk awareness programmes. We also encourage all States to endorse the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned about the increase in cases of denial of humanitarian access. Safe, rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid is not only a vital necessity to protect children; it is also a legal obligation and can be guaranteed only if United Nations and humanitarian personnel, including local staff, are respected and protected. Resolution 2730 (2024), which we brought before the Council, must be implemented.

Finally, in a context of budgetary pressures and reforms, it is essential to remember the tangible results achieved through the children and armed conflict agenda. Since 1999, more than 200,000 children have been liberated from armed forces and groups and reintegrated into their communities. Those achievements attest to the importance of that agenda and of preserving its gains, particularly the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. The Mechanism plays a vital role in identifying violations, ensuring accountability and providing effective responses. Switzerland actively supports the Mechanism in Syria and Yemen, and it co-chairs the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict in Yemen.



It is essential to preserve the independence, impartiality and credibility of the instruments at our disposal. The criteria applied for listing or delisting parties responsible for serious violations in the annexes to the annual report must be clear, consistent and objective.

I would like to conclude by sharing the words of Grace Akallo, who was abducted as a child by an armed group in Uganda. She said:

“The children and armed conflict mandate gives us hope — it draws attention to our suffering and pushes the world to protect children caught up in war.”

Switzerland will continue working to that end.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

**Mr. Melnyk (Ukraine):** Let me thank the Guyanese presidency and Minister Vindhya Persaud for convening this debate. Ukraine is grateful to Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter for her dedicated work and commends UNICEF and Director SenGupta for their unwavering service.

The report before us (S/2025/247) paints a truly devastating picture, with the highest number of grave violations against children ever recorded. Ukraine welcomes that report and thanks the Secretary-General for shedding light on soul-shaking truths that must not leave any of us indifferent.

As Russia continues its military invasion of Ukraine, it not only failed to prevent harm to children; its armed forces escalated brutal attacks on densely populated areas. As a result, the number of grave violations committed by Russian troops rose by an appalling 105 per cent. Yet, sadly, the report includes unverified allegations of child casualties in Russia itself, while ignoring at least 16 documented cases, officially submitted by Ukraine, of sexual violence against Ukrainian children by Russian forces.

We commend the decision of the Secretary-General to list the armed forces of the Russian Federation as a persistent perpetrator of grave violations against children in Ukraine for the third consecutive year. What a disgrace. In line with the relevant United Nations guidelines, we call on the Secretariat to suspend Russia's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, including through troop and police contributions, until its armed forces are delisted.

It is a painful truth that the Council's resolutions on the protection of children are increasingly treated with indifference by States that continue to wage ruthless wars. The obligations that we set forth are, all too often, being dismissed. Appeals for compliance are brushed aside like whispers in the wind. Ukraine believes that the time has come for the Council to respond with resolve by adopting a new resolution that introduces stronger, enforceable measures against those who blatantly violate children's rights — a resolution that also provides redress to affected families.

Let me offer three creative yet practical proposals for the Council's consideration.

The first step that we need to take is to end impunity for repeat offenders. Parties that are consistently listed by the Secretary-General must face automatic consequences, including targeted sanctions.

Secondly, let us punish individual perpetrators. Accountability must go beyond groups and institutions. We propose the establishment of a United Nations-administered blacklist for individual commanders and military and paramilitary leaders responsible for grave violations against children, with assets freezes, travel bans and other personal restrictions.

Lastly, let us establish a mandatory child victims compensation fund. States responsible for grave violations must be obligated to make payments into a United



Nations-administered trust fund to support child victims and their families. If those States refuse, the Council should authorize the freezing of national assets to fulfil that obligation.

Ukraine stands ready to actively contribute to this agenda, including in close coordination with Greece, which currently chairs the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

My final point is that, in order to stop children being killed and maimed in Ukraine, we need one simple thing: there must be a full, unconditional ceasefire for at least 30 days as a first step towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, in line with the Charter of the United Nations. We call upon Russia to free and to return the tens of thousands of deported Ukrainian children home unconditionally and without delay.

Before I conclude, I have just one final remark: Russia's representative has continued spreading lies in the Council. I think that maybe they believe that the bigger the lie, the more people will believe it. That trick is not going to work any longer. I appeal to the representative of Russia to cease abusing the Security Council. The facts in the report of the Secretary-General are very stubborn things — they speak for themselves. Therefore, please spare us the fantasy novel. George Orwell would be turning in his grave at such distortion of truth.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

**Mr. Kössler** (Austria): Austria thanks Guyana for convening this open debate and aligns itself with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Let me start by commending Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter for her boldness and tireless efforts over the past eight years. Her clear voice is much needed in these times. Let me also thank UNICEF for the very important work that they do in conjunction with the children and armed conflict agenda.

The reported 25 per cent increase in the numbers of grave violations is not only alarming; it is unbearable. Austria strongly condemns all abuses against children and calls for accountability. It is crystal clear that protecting children in armed conflict is not an option — it is a legal obligation, and it is a moral imperative.

What we need today is renewed political resolve to change the status quo and turn around the grim statistics. The children and armed conflict agenda, and in particular its Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, not only provide us with a snapshot of an unacceptable situation; they also help us to identify longer-term trends of how conflicts evolve, thereby serving as a key indicator for peace and security to which we all — and especially the Council — must direct our attention and efforts. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and other tools of the agenda will need to be adapted. Austria stands ready to help find new ways to further strengthen the available tool set.

As a long-standing troop contributor and in line with resolution 2764 (2024), Austria also supports the call for increased child protection capacity in all United Nations peace operations, particularly in transition settings as well.

Furthermore, and lastly, we must focus on prevention. The children who have not been harmed are not part of the reported negative statistics that I started with, yet their lives are part of what has been accomplished by the work done in the delivery of the children and armed conflict mandate. Countries that have engaged with and grown out of a children and armed conflict experience have a lot to tell us about the positive effects of such a transformation. We call upon all parties that have not done so to review their military doctrines, policies and planning, especially regarding the

use of explosive weapons, and to take effective measures to end and prevent rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

As the primary victims of armed conflict, children want and deserve peace. Council members can count on Austria to support that agenda with resolve.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

**Mr. Oehri (Liechtenstein):** We reiterate our continued support for the children and armed conflict agenda, which, sadly, bears particular relevance today, with nearly one in five children worldwide directly affected by conflict. We are deeply alarmed that, after already reaching a record high in 2023, the number of verified grave violations against children further increased significantly last year, despite the more limited monitoring capacity of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The increase in reported incidents of sexual violence is particularly shocking. To give a particularly disturbing example, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/247), those crimes increased by a staggering 1,000 per cent in Haiti. An especially concerning trend is the rise in children affected by multiple grave violations through a convergence of abduction, recruitment and sexual violence. The report further notes a 125 per cent increase in the number of boy victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. While those horrendous crimes mostly affect adolescent and young girls, conflict-related sexual violence against boys is underreported. We commend the tireless advocacy of organizations, including the Liechtenstein-based All Survivors Project, which raises awareness of this overlooked violation against children in armed conflict. All reported crimes must be rigorously investigated and prosecuted, including by the International Criminal Court, which has done groundbreaking work in that regard. The only way to effectively protect children, however, is to prevent war in the first place, in line with the United Nations fundamental purpose of preventing and ending war and the inevitable war crimes that accompany it.

In recent years, the denial of humanitarian access during conflict has become one of the most prevalent grave violations. That denial, along with the use of starvation as a weapon of war against civilians, disproportionately affect children and are prohibited under international humanitarian law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In Gaza alone, the United Nations verified more than 2,200 denials of humanitarian access by the Israeli authorities — more than a third of all cases verified worldwide. Children remain trapped in besieged areas, are deprived of access to food and water and lack adequate medical assistance, including vaccines. Liechtenstein strongly condemns any use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and stresses the obligation not to deprive civilians in Gaza of the objects indispensable to their survival, including by wilfully impeding relief supplies and access. We reiterate the calls made during last week's tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly for Israel to grant access to humanitarian organizations for the necessary emergency relief to be provided to civilians in Gaza (A/ES-10/PV.61 and PV.62).

As we are currently discussing ways to make this Organization fit for purpose, Liechtenstein reiterates its support for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, established 20 years ago by resolution 1612 (2005). Ensuring the independence and integrity of that mandate and of its reporting on such violations against children are crucial for the credibility of the children and armed conflict agenda. As the Secretary-General and his Special Representative have repeatedly underlined, those instruments have proven effective in changing the behaviour of parties to conflict and in strengthening the protection of children. In that regard, we reiterate that those tools will only remain as powerful as they are if they are credible and consistently applied to all perpetrators in all contexts.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

**Mr. Al-Fatlawi** (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): We appreciate your participation in this meeting, Madam President. We also thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and Ms. Sheema SenGupta for their briefings. The delegation of Iraq would like to thank the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Guyana to the United Nations for convening this important meeting on children and armed conflict on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) — the basis for establishing the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The Government of Iraq has paid great attention to human rights issues by continuing to strengthen national measures to protect the rights of children. Those measures include constructive cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, significant cooperation with the UNICEF office in Iraq through the signing of a joint action plan on 30 March 2023 and our continuing cooperation with the country team in Baghdad to implement the plan in a practical and integrated manner over the course of a full year. That was followed by a successful visit by the Special Representative and her team to Iraq in January 2024 to see first-hand the measures taken by the competent authorities to implement the plan. In line with the Special Representative's letter to the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, dated 25 January 2024, a new national committee for the prevention of violations of children's rights was established in February 2024. In that connection, the Iraqi delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General, the Special Representative and her Office and the UNICEF office in Iraq for their joint and continuous efforts, which culminated in the Secretary-General's confirming, in his latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2025/247), that, in view of the measures adopted by the Iraqi Government to protect children, the situation of Iraq will be removed from the Secretary-General's next report.

My delegation takes this opportunity to draw the Council's attention to the aforementioned report of the Secretary-General, which calls on all States concerned to assume their responsibilities in ensuring the voluntary return of their nationals from Al-Hol camp in the northeastern Syrian Arab Republic. The Government of the Republic of Iraq reaffirms its commitment to cooperating with the relevant United Nations agencies, underscoring its fruitful cooperation with UNICEF and international organizations in repatriating Iraqi nationals to the Al-Jeddah centre in Iraq in order to rehabilitate them and reunite them with their families and communities, as part of our responsibility towards our citizens. The Secretary-General's report noted that the Iraqi Government has repatriated 1,529 Iraqi children to Iraq from Al-Hol camp in Syria.

In that regard, Iraq joins the Secretary-General in calling on the States concerned to repatriate their children and to rehabilitate and reintegrate women and children while ensuring that the perpetrators of crimes are held accountable. Although Iraq is committed to its duties to foreign children in Iraq and to providing them with the necessary support, it urges States to shoulder their responsibilities towards their nationals in Iraq by facilitating their repatriation. We express our appreciation to those countries that have responded to Iraq's appeal and cooperated with us in repatriating their nationals, and we call on the other countries to promptly shoulder that responsibility, since a sustainable solution to the humanitarian issue lies in collective responsibility and joint cooperation, which embody the principle of burden-sharing advocated by the Secretary-General.

In conclusion, we would like to underscore the suffering of Palestinian children in Gaza and throughout the occupied Palestinian territories as a result of the grave violations committed by the Israeli occupation forces, to which the Secretary-General's report refers. We call on the Council to take the appropriate action in line

with its legal responsibilities for ending those violations and holding the perpetrators accountable to the rules of international law.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

**Mr. Prabowo** (Indonesia): The adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) represented a solemn promise that the international community would no longer remain idle while children became the silent victims of armed conflicts. As we commemorate its twentieth anniversary, we must ask ourselves whether the world and the Council have lived up to that promise. Sadly, the figures have only gone up. That watershed moment did not lead to a safer world for children. Almost every year since its adoption, we have been told that we just witnessed the worst year for children in armed conflicts. That includes last year, when the number reached an unprecedented level with a 25 per cent surge in grave violations against children compared to the year before, driven mostly by grave violence against children in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The need for urgent action has never been greater. In that regard, allow me to underline three points.

First, collective punishment is never right, and, when children are dying in vast numbers as a result, it is simply unacceptable — legally, politically, militarily and morally. Grave violations against children must be addressed without delay. Impunity must not be allowed. All parties to conflict must adhere to international humanitarian law and the sanctity of child protection.

Secondly, stronger synergy among United Nations bodies on the ground is key. Partnership is of crucial importance to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including prioritizing the humanitarian needs of children in armed conflicts. Children must be guaranteed immediate and unhindered access to food, clean water, shelter and medical care. Every State must respect the privileges and immunities of United Nations agencies, along with other applicable principles and rules of international law, including international humanitarian law. We look forward to the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on that pressing matter.

Thirdly, children must be part of peacebuilding strategies. That includes strategies for the reintegration of all children formerly associated with armed groups, through a holistic approach that addresses their emotional, psychological and social needs. Such an effort would serve as a strategic element to prevent the relapse into conflict and to break the cycle of violence. Assisting them in reuniting with their families or caregivers and destigmatizing them are crucial for them to regain a normal life. Education plays an important role in providing them with a better foundation and greater hope for their future.

We often say that children are the future of the world. Therefore, when we fail to protect them, we destroy the future of their communities, their countries, their generations and our world. Indonesia calls on the Council to match words with action, to follow every expression of concern with concrete steps. The question before the Council is no longer what else can we say but what more can we do to protect our children.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting.

I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.05 p.m.*