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Children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, is the seventh report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It covers the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 March 2020 and the information provided focuses on the six grave violations committed against children, the perpetrators thereof and the context in which the violations took place.

The report sets out the trends and patterns of grave violations against children by all parties to the conflict and provides details on progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through action plan implementation.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations to end and prevent grave violations against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and improve the protection of children.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, is the seventh report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and covers the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 March 2020. It contains information on the trends and patterns of grave violations against children since the previous report ([S/2018/502](#)) and an outline of the progress and challenges since the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in July 2018 ([S/AC.51/2018/2](#)). The violations presented herein have been verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is co-chaired by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations are identified, including the 15 parties listed in the annexes to my report on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)).

2. The report is focused on the trends of violations in the provinces of Ituri, Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Maniema, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika. The ability to verify information was sometimes hampered by insecurity or access restrictions. Therefore, the information contained herein may not represent the full scale of violations committed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the reporting period.

II. Overview of the political and security situation

3. Presidential elections were held on 30 December 2018, followed by a relatively peaceful transition to power of the President, Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, on 24 January 2019. The election period was marked by political tensions, affecting children only marginally, with 15 children arrested for national security reasons during electoral protests.

4. Following the formation of a new Government in September 2019, the security situation improved in certain areas, such as the Kasai and Tanganyika Provinces. The situation in other provinces, including Ituri, North and South Kivu, as well as northern Tanganyika, remained volatile, with the activities of over 135 armed groups representing the main threat to children. Intercommunal violence was also a source of conflict, with an upsurge in inter-ethnic violence in Ituri and South Kivu, claiming the lives of many children. Military operations of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo – FARDC) against foreign armed groups, such as the Conseil national pour le renouveau et la démocratie (CNRD), resulted in the surrender and repatriation of combatants and their dependants to Rwanda. Other FARDC military operations, notably against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), had more adverse impacts on children, as they were often followed by retaliatory attacks by ADF.

5. Despite the overall decrease in violence against children and the growing willingness among armed groups to surrender, children continued to suffer from conflict and were particularly at risk of being internally displaced, thus exacerbating their vulnerabilities. As of March 2020, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was home to the largest population of internally displaced persons in Africa, with 5.5 million people displaced, 3.2 million of whom were children. Humanitarian access to children in need was seriously hampered in areas where armed groups were active and military

operations were ongoing. Access constraints, including security incidents against humanitarian staff and their assets and illegal taxation, continued to affect the delivery of humanitarian assistance for thousands of children.

North Kivu

6. North Kivu witnessed the greatest proliferation of national and foreign armed groups. Children were mainly vulnerable to recruitment and use by community-based self-defence groups, such as Nyatura and Mai-Mai Mazembe, who increasingly recruited children in response to threats posed by other groups.

7. The security situation in Beni territory continued to be of concern, owing to ADF activities targeting FARDC, the United Nations and civilians. At the end of 2018 and in 2019, FARDC, supported by MONUSCO, launched military operations targeting ADF, who subsequently dispersed into smaller and very mobile units and undertook retaliatory attacks against civilians that deeply affected children. In Lubero territory, Mai-Mai groups remained a threat to the local population, while using children for tax collection and forced labour. Mai-Mai groups in Lubero and Beni territories were also responsible for a surge in violence, which significantly impaired the activities of the Ebola response teams. At least eight attacks were carried out against Ebola response health facilities in Butembo area, prolonging the Ebola outbreak and causing delays in the roll-out of other vaccination programmes for children.

8. Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové (NDC-Rénové) expanded its control over Masisi and Rutshuru territories, resulting in clashes with Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS), Nyatura and Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), during which children participated in combat. The activities of NDC-Rénové prompted the movement of over 6,000 CNRD combatants and dependants, including an estimated 2,000 children, from North Kivu to South Kivu. An arrest warrant for Guidon Shimiray, commander of NDC-Rénové, was issued in June 2019. Notwithstanding that development, NDC-Rénové continued to fight and maintained control over large areas in Walikale, Masisi and Rutshuru territories, posing an ongoing threat to children.

9. Despite those developments, a combination of outreach to armed groups by MONUSCO and military pressure by FARDC opened opportunities for armed groups, or factions thereof, to surrender and demobilize, and to release children. Among those groups were Nyatura (Delta and Kavumbi factions), Alliance des forces de résistance congolaise (AFRC, formerly known as Mai-Mai Charles), FDLR and Mai-Mai Mazembe (Union des patriotes pour la libération du Congo (UPLC) faction).

South Kivu

10. The situation in South Kivu remained volatile owing to the presence of foreign and Congolese armed groups, intercommunal conflict and the illicit exploitation of natural resources, as well as ongoing military operations by FARDC. On the highlands of Fizi, Uvira and Mwenga territories, intercommunal tensions, all supported by various Mai-Mai groups, resulted in population displacement and the destruction of 89 villages, between March and October 2019. All parties recruited and used children. In Fizi and Uvira territories, children were also recruited by Mai-Mai groups to protect local communities from elements of the Forces nationales de libération (FNL) and Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi-Tabara, both Burundian armed groups opposing the Burundian government. In addition, the level of activity of armed groups in South Kivu further increased, following the forced movement of CNRD combatants and dependants from North Kivu to South Kivu. In December 2019, FARDC launched operations against CNRD, resulting in the surrender of 360

combatants with 1,200 dependants, including 384 children, who were held in Nyamunyuni camp, Kabare territory, managed by FARDC. While awaiting repatriation to Rwanda, at least 11 children died and many others fell ill, as living conditions in the camp were inadequate. Military pressure by FARDC and advocacy from the country task force resulted in the release of children by Mai-Mai Yakutumba in Fizi territory. Raia Mutomboki factions, who continued to recruit and use children and commit sexual violence against children, remained active in Kabare, Kalehe, Shabunda and Walungu territories, often with peaks in violence after FARDC redeployment from those areas to the Hauts Plateaux region.

Ituri

11. In Djugu and Mahagi territories, intercommunal violence reached new peaks in 2019, causing population displacement and affecting children. Attacks in late 2018 mainly targeted state symbols and FARDC positions, but throughout 2019, the violence shifted towards civilian targets, resulting in the burning of villages, attacks on schools and the killing of civilians, including children. A new group called La Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) emerged and was a main perpetrator of violations against children in the conflict between Lendu farmers and Hema herders.

12. In Irumu territory, the political process to demobilize the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) that started in 2018 resulted in the signing of a peace agreement between FRPI and the Government in February 2020. This led to a decrease in the rape, killing and recruitment of children by FRPI. However, FRPI leadership did not agree to present all troops for age verification, making it impossible to screen and release the 250 children estimated to be present in their ranks at the time. Meanwhile, in Kinshasa, a trial against former FRPI commander Cobra Matata, who was charged, *inter alia*, with responsibility for the recruitment of children, commenced in August 2019. The security situation in southern Irumu was also affected by the presence of ADF elements moving from North Kivu. During one attack by ADF on 23 August 2019, 53 children were abducted for the purposes of forced labour and ransom.

Tanganyika and Maniema

13. In Tanganyika Province, intercommunal tensions between the Twa and Luba communities over access to land, the distribution of power and long-standing discrimination fed ongoing violence. The security situation initially stabilized in 2019, but violence flared in the first quarter of 2020, following intercommunal clashes and increased activity by Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale, as well as Mai-Mai Fimbo na Fimbo, both of which recruited children. Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale emerged in 2017 as a primarily Twa militia, with links to Mai-Mai Yakutumba, and opposing the government of then-President, Joseph Kabila. Mai-Mai Fimbo na Fimbo emerged in 2017 as a militia with a mixed ethnic background of Twa, Luba and Tabwa communities, opposing FARDC.

14. In Maniema Province, Mai-Mai Malaika emerged as a new group, with alliances with Raia Mutomboki, based in South Kivu. Clashes between FARDC and Mai-Mai Malaika were also reported in Kongolo, Kalemie and Nyunzu territories, thus causing spillover effects in Tanganyika Province, where children associated with Mai-Mai Malaika were killed during clashes with FARDC.

Greater Kasai region

15. The greater Kasai region, comprised of the provinces of Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental and Kasai, witnessed a relative calm and the self-demobilization of

thousands of Kamuina Nsapu combatants, including more than 800 children. Overall, despite localized incidents, the security situation stabilized. The de-escalation of the conflict in the Kasais is reflected in a decrease in the number of violations against children, and an increase in the number of children separated from parties to conflict who returned to their communities.

III. Grave violations committed against children

16. During the reporting period, the country task force verified 9,957 grave violations affecting 8,444 children (6,439 boys, 2,005 girls) by 58 parties to conflict. At least 1,367 children were victims of more than one violation. The total number of violations also include 4,639 children who were recruited before 2018 but used until their separation in the reporting period. This particularly high number of verified violations is mostly explained by the increased access to information from groups that surrendered, self-demobilized or engaged with the country task force.

17. Cases of children recruited and separated during the reporting period (also referred to as “new recruitment”) continued to decrease, a trend already noted in the previous report of the Secretary-General ([S/2018/502](#)). The killing, maiming and abduction of children, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals, also decreased significantly, which is partly explained by the de-escalation of conflict in the greater Kasai region. The exception to this trend is with respect to sexual violence, for which the number of incidents remained high, with 763 cases verified. Despite children being less affected by conflict overall, spikes in violations were seen in specific areas in the provinces of Ituri, Tanganyika, North Kivu and South Kivu, owing to intercommunal violence. In addition, FARDC military operations against ADF and CNRD were accompanied by population displacement and exposed children to violations, including through retaliatory attacks by armed groups.

18. Armed groups remained the main threat to children, with 9,498 violations (95 per cent) attributed to such groups. Violations by government security forces, however, in particular sexual violence (332) and the killing and maiming of children (90), remained a concern.

A. Recruitment and use

19. A total of 7,456 children (6,229 boys, 1,227 girls) were separated from 56 parties to conflict and verified by the country task force as having been associated during the reporting period. Of those children, 4,639 children were recruited in the years before 2018 but used until their separation during the reporting period. The remaining 2,817 (2,427 boys, 390 girls) were recruited and separated within the reporting period. The downward trend in new recruitment is explained by such factors as the de-escalation of conflict in the greater Kasai region; the decrease in armed groups’ activities in the immediate post-electoral period, when several armed groups looked to lay down arms and surrender; and a greater engagement of the country task force with armed groups in order to stop recruitment and use, and to release children.

20. Confirming a trend outlined in the previous report ([S/2018/502](#)), the number of new cases of recruitment and use continued to decline, with 2,817 children newly recruited. Cases fell from 1,887 in 2018 to 906 in 2019 and 24 in the first quarter of 2020. They were verified in North Kivu (2,039 or 72 per cent), South Kivu (267), the greater Kasai region (256), Tanganyika (121), Ituri (88), Maniema (44), Tshopo and Bas-Uélé (1 each). As noted above, the greater Kasai region witnessed a significant decrease, while in South Kivu and Maniema, numbers remained at similar levels as reported in previous years, reflecting the ongoing practice of child recruitment and

use by several Mai-Mai groups in Uvira territory and by Mai-Mai Malaika in Maniema. In Ituri, children were recruited mostly by CODECO, and used in attacks on villages. In Tanganyika, the country task force re-established a presence in Kalemie in November 2018, resulting in a higher number of verified cases, as newly recruited children were separated from Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale and Mai-Mai Fimbo na Fimbo, some of whose factions had surrendered.

21. Of all the case of recruitment and use, 99 per cent of children were newly recruited and used by 44 armed groups. Most cases were attributed to Nyatura (796), followed by Mai-Mai Mazembe (503), Kamuina Nsapu (255), CNRD (156), NDC-Rénové (139), Raia Mutomboki (120), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (103), Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi (FOCA) (102), Mai-Mai Charles/Alliance des forces de résistance congolaise (81), ADF (70), Mai-Mai Malaika (54), APCLS (52), FRPI (25), Mai-Mai Yakutumba (Coalition nationale du peuple pour la souveraineté du Congo (CNPSC) faction) (19), FDLR (19), Bantu militia (19), FDLR-Ralliement pour l'unité et la démocratie (RUD) (17), CODECO (10) and other armed groups (23). A total of 252 children were also recruited and used by several other Mai-Mai groups.

22. Six children were verified as having been recruited and used by FARDC (5) and the Congolese National Police (1), including two newly recruited during the reporting period. In one instance, a 16-year-old boy was recruited by the police in Shabunda, South Kivu, in January 2018. After one month of performing police duties, the boy was arrested for the rape of a girl and tried before a juvenile court. In another case, a 15-year-old boy, who lied about his age, voluntarily joined FARDC in Rutshuru, North Kivu, after the death of his parents in July 2018. After one year, during which the boy participated in active combat, he was identified, separated and transferred to an interim care centre. The remaining four children were recruited in prior years but used until their separation during the reporting period. For example, two 16-year-old boys were recruited in 2017 and used throughout 2018 by the 806th regiment of FARDC in North Kivu. Those incidents were committed by low-ranking commanders, acting independently, who were all disciplined by their hierarchy.

23. Of note, 1,037 newly recruited children (37 per cent of the total) were under the age of 15, and 390 (or 14 per cent) were girls, recruited primarily in the Kasais, North Kivu and Ituri Provinces. Most children were Congolese, except for six Rwandan, six Burundian and two Ugandan children.

24. Children were used in active combat. However, the number of children used as combatants decreased from 794 (or 42 per cent) in 2018 to 342 (or 37 per cent) in 2019. For example, Mai-Mai Mazembe and Nyatura used 35 per cent and 55 per cent of all the children associated with their forces as combatants, respectively. Children were used by armed groups to fight in clashes against other armed groups and against FARDC. Many children were forced, in particular by ADF and CODECO, to commit atrocities against civilians. Boys and girls were also used in a variety of support roles, including as bodyguards, tax and food collectors, porters, cooks, mine labourers, herders, spies and sexual slaves or “wives”.

25. A total of 980 children (or 35 per cent) were recruited through abduction from their homes and schools, or from roads and fields. Most other children joined the armed groups owing to a combination of poverty and lack of opportunities, and sometimes to feel empowered by belonging to an armed group. Children also joined self-defence community-based groups to protect their communities, as is the case of the Twa and Luba conflict in the Tanganyika Province, or in the greater Kasai region. In a small number of cases (2 per cent), children who had escaped or were released from armed groups were rerecruited by the same or different armed groups, sometimes within days of family reunification. Furthermore, some groups such as

Mai-Mai Mazembe and Nyatura employed initiation rituals, such as tattooing or ceremonial cuts on the arm, and threatened those who refused to participate. In other instances, children who were not able to pay the taxes levied on agricultural products by Nyatura were taken by the group to perform forced labour.

26. Children who were recruited and used were also victims of, or exposed to, other grave violations, including killing and maiming and sexual violence. For example, at least 331 of newly recruited girls (29 per cent) reported being subjected to rape, sexual slavery or forced marriage during their association with armed groups.

27. Of the 7,456 children, 3,407 (46 per cent) could be verified as having been recruited and used only after they had escaped from armed groups, 2,130 (28 per cent) during demobilization processes, 1,790 (24 per cent) as a result of targeted outreach to armed groups, and 129 (2 per cent) after they were arrested or captured by government forces.

Detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups

28. A total of 263 children, including 15 girls, between the ages of 8 and 17, were held in detention by FARDC (236) and the Congolese National Police (27) for their alleged association with armed groups (248), or on national security grounds, following electoral protests (15). The detentions were verified in the greater Kasai region (105), and the provinces of North Kivu (80), South Kivu (54), Tanganyika (13) and Ituri (11). Most children were handed over to the country task force after a period of between 2 and 30 days in custody. At least 29 children, however, were detained for periods ranging between one and two years, in violation of the directives issued in 2013 by the Minister of Defence and the National Intelligence Agency (Agence nationale de renseignements) to immediately hand over children formerly associated with armed groups to child protection actors. For example, between January and July 2019, following advocacy by the country task force, 33 boys between the ages of 13 and 17 were released from Kananga central prison, Kasai Central Province. They had been detained with adult prisoners since December 2017, as they were considered as adults, pending age verification.

29. Most detained children (214) were held in temporary detention facilities and 49 children were detained in long-term correctional facilities, including the central prisons of Goma, Bukavu, Kinshasa and Kananga. Children reported poor conditions, notably overcrowding and a lack of food. Children detained in Goma and Kananga prisons also reported “parallel administrations” set up by prisoners, where discipline was administered by rule of the strongest. Children were forced to perform duties, including the cleaning of latrines, with minimal respect for hygiene. Of concern, information was received about the sexual abuse of six girls during their detention by FARDC and Congolese National Police officers.

B. Killing and maiming

30. The country task force verified 391 child casualties, namely the killing of 182 children (109 boys, 73 girls) and the maiming of 209 (141 boys, 68 girls). The trend remained similar in 2018 and 2019, with 177 children killed (84) or maimed (93) and in 2019 with 161 killing (70) and maiming (91) of children. In the first quarter of 2020, there were 53 children killed (37) and maimed (26).

31. North Kivu remained the most affected province with a total of 153 children affected (39 per cent; 65 killed, 88 maimed), mostly in crossfire during armed clashes among armed groups or military operations by FARDC, and during attacks on villages by some of the armed groups. In Ituri, intercommunal violence between Hema and Lendu communities deeply affected the lives of children with 87 children killed (41)

or maimed (46) during attacks on villages by the opposing ethnic group. The greater Kasai region witnessed a significant decrease as compared with my previous report (S/2018/502), with 69 child casualties (37 killed, 32 maimed), owing to a cessation of FARDC operations and the self-demobilization processes of armed groups that commenced in 2019. Other provinces included South Kivu (30: 10 killed, 20 maimed), Tanganyika (25: 12 killed, 13 maimed), Maniema (16: 12 killed, 4 maimed) and Sankuru (11: 5 killed, 6 maimed).

32. Responsibility for most incidents was attributed to armed groups, with 274 (70 per cent) of all cases of killing (127) and maiming (147). Perpetrators were CODECO (75), Kamuina Nsapu (45), ADF (43), Nyatura (37), Mai-Mai Mazembe (9), Mai-Mai Malaika (9), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (9), non-identified Mai-Mai groups (9), Mai-Mai Omera (8), FDLR (6), NDC-Rénové (6) FRPI (5), Forces républicaines fédéralistes (FRF)-Gumino (5), APCLS-Janvier (3), Raia Mutomboki (2), Bana Mura (1), AFRC (1) and Mai-Mai Uhuru (1). For example, between 11 and 17 September 2019, in Djugu territory, Ituri, CODECO killed 10 children between the ages of 3 and 17, three of whom were decapitated. In Beni territory, North Kivu, 43 child casualties were caused by ADF retaliatory attacks against civilians following FARDC operations against the group. Of note, children affected by Nyatura, Mai-Mai Mazembe, Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale and some by Kamuina Nsapu were verified as associated with those groups at the time of the incidents and at least 12 children used as combatants by armed groups were killed or maimed on the frontlines during clashes.

33. Of concern, ethnic strife was a leading cause of child casualties during the reporting period and children were targeted in cycles of reprisal attacks. For instance, all incidents of killing (41) and maiming (46) in Ituri occurred in the context of intercommunal violence. Indeed, since March 2018, clashes that erupted between the Hema and Lendu communities took a heavy toll on Hema children, as CODECO was the main perpetrator among armed groups, accounting for 19 per cent of all child casualties. In Tanganyika, intercommunal conflict between Twa and Luba was responsible for the killing of eight children and the maiming of six. In South Kivu, intercommunal violence caused the killing of 6 children and the maiming of 11 children.

34. Responsibility was attributed to the government security forces for 90 cases (23 per cent) of killing (42) and maiming (48), namely FARDC (78) and Congolese National Police (12). Most killings by FARDC occurred during military operations against armed groups, during which 30 children were killed by bullets. Other children were killed by FARDC during attacks on civilians (4), at roadblocks where children were stopped to pay taxes (6), and during protests in Bukavu, South Kivu, during the electoral period (2). Military operations were mainly concentrated in North Kivu, notably against ADF; in the greater Kasai region against Kamuina Nsapu in 2019; as well as in Maniema against Mai-Mai Malaika in 2020. For instance, on 24 February 2019 in Kamonia territory, Kasai Province, eight children (7 boys, 1 girl) associated with Kamuina Nsapu were shot dead during a raid on a gathering site of former Kamuina Nsapu elements. On 11 January 2020, eight children (4 boys, 4 girls) were killed by FARDC in crossfire during clashes with Mai-Mai Malaika in the vicinity of a school in Maniema Province.

35. A total of 27 cases of killing (12) and maiming (15) (7 per cent) resulted from unexploded ordnance, responsibility for which could not be attributed to a specific party.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

36. The country task force verified the cases of 763 children, including three boys, who were raped (654), gang-raped (32) and subjected to sexual slavery (63) or other

forms of sexual violence (14). There was a surge in violations in 2018 (394) compared to 2017 (181) (see [S/2018/502](#)), before decreasing to 300 in 2019 and to 69 in the first quarter of 2020. Ongoing insecurity and conflict, ethnically motivated violence, the widespread presence of military actors in communities and the constant rotation of FARDC troops, contributed to these high numbers. Out of 763 children, 313 (41 per cent) were girls under the age of 15, and the youngest victim was a 3-year-old. Despite the high number of verified cases, the scale of sexual violence against children is believed to be underreported owing to fear of retaliation by perpetrators who sometimes live in or near the community, stigmatization and rejection by families and communities, widespread impunity and a lack of adequate medical and support services for survivors.

37. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators of sexual violence against children and were responsible for 431 cases (56 per cent). Cases were attributed to Nyatura (82), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (46), Raia Mutomboki (41), CNRD (34), Kamuina Nsapu (31), Mai-Mai Mazembe (28), NDC-Rénové (28), FDLR (22), Bantu militia (21), FRPI (18), CODECO (11), Mai-Mai Luc (10), AFRC (9), Mai-Mai Kifuafua (7), Mai-Mai Yakutumba (6), non-identified Mai-Mai groups (6), FDLR-FOCA (5), Mai-Mai Malaika (5), Mai-Mai Ngubito (5), APCLS (3) and other parties (13). Of note is the significant reduction in the number of cases of sexual violence committed by FRPI, from being responsible for the highest number of verified cases in my previous report ([S/2018/502](#)) with 148 cases, to 18 in 2018 and zero cases in 2019. The improvement in this regard is believed to be linked to the peace negotiations between FRPI and the Government, which led to the conclusion of a peace agreement on 28 February 2020. Furthermore, allegations involving Bana Mura, reported during the previous reporting period, were verified at a later date by the country task force (between 1 January and 31 March 2020). Of the 219 children (94 boys, 125 girls) abducted by Bana Mura in April 2017, it was verified that the 125 girls were used for purposes of sexual slavery.

38. With regard to government security forces, they were attributed responsibility for 332 cases (44 per cent), namely FARDC (224), the Congolese National Police (99) and the National Intelligence Agency (9), which is consistent with the trends outlined in the previous report. Those incidents were committed in various contexts, and increasingly in the house of the child or the perpetrator (45 per cent). Girls were also vulnerable to sexual violence as they returned from work in the fields (26 per cent). Rapes were also committed in the context of military operations (11 per cent). Six children were raped in detention. According to information received by the country task force, of the 332 cases attributed to government security forces, 181 suspected perpetrators were reportedly arrested. Nevertheless, government security forces continue to commit sexual violence with impunity, as illustrated by the use of 18 girls as concubines by officers of the 2,105th regiment, in Kasai Province in 2019. Despite the release of six girls after advocacy by the country task force, no judicial investigations were undertaken and access to the girls for interview was refused.

39. North Kivu continued to be the most affected province, with 314 incidents verified (41 per cent), followed by the greater Kasai region (107), South Kivu (102), Tanganyika (79), Ituri (56), Maniema (25), Haut-Katanga (18), Tshopo (14), Haut-Uélé (9), Sankuru (9), Équateur (6), Kongo Central (6), Mai-Ndombe (5), Haut-Lomami (3), Kwilu (3), Nord-Ubangi (2), Kwango (1), Lomami (1), Mongala (1), Tshuapa (1), Bas-Uélé (1). In North Kivu, children living in areas where armed groups clashed over the control of territory were the most affected. For example, in Masisi, rape was used as a weapon of war by NDC-Rénové, Nyatura and CNRD to spread fear among the population and exert control over communities. Children in the greater Kasai region were generally less affected by sexual violence than previously reported (see [S/2018/502](#)), however, government security forces were responsible for a

disproportionate number of cases of sexual violence in the area (66 per cent). In South Kivu, mass rapes were committed by Raia Mutomboki elements in Shabunda territory in 2018 and by several Mai-Mai groups in the highlands of Uvira territory in 2019. In Tanganyika Province, the occurrence of sexual violence against children increased notably, from 19 cases in 2018 to 59 cases in 2019, which may have been partly the result of increased monitoring capacity by the country task force which had re-established its presence in the area. In Djugu territory, Ituri Province, CODECO raped and gang-raped girls during attacks on villages of the Hema community. However, the total number of incidents of sexual violence in Ituri Province decreased compared to the previous report, following the peace agreement signed between FRPI and the Government.

40. Rape, forced marriage and the sexual slavery of children often occurred in the context of other violations, such as recruitment and use (299) or abduction (32). For instance, in North Kivu, the country task force verified that 54 girls were subjected to sexual violence during their association with Nyatura. In one incident, a 14-year-old girl was abducted by Nyatura elements and brought to their camp, where she underwent military training and was used for the purposes of looting food and as an escort. The girl was also forcibly married to one Nyatura element, before she managed to flee.

41. Boys were also at risk of sexual violence, even if the number of verified cases was far lower (3). They were particularly vulnerable while associated with armed groups or in detention. It is essential to underscore that sexual violence against boys remains underreported as a result of shame, social stigma and inadequate services for male survivors. For instance, in April 2019, in Lubero territory, North Kivu, a 16-year-old boy was recruited and sexually abused by having thorns inserted into his penis by Mai-Mai Mazembe elements.

42. Sexual exploitation and abuse of children by peacekeepers continued to be a concern in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Information on allegations received, as well as on measures taken by the United Nations or by Member States, is available online at <https://conduct.unmissions.org>.

D. Attacks against schools and hospitals

43. The country task force verified 135 attacks on schools (110) and health facilities (25), of which 100 (75 per cent) occurred in 2018, 30 in 2019, and 5 in the first quarter of 2020. The decreasing number of incidents is the result of the de-escalation of violence in the greater Kasai region, where schools and hospitals have not been targeted since 2018. Most of the attacks on schools and hospitals took place in the context of clashes between Hema and Lendu communities in Djugu territory, Ituri Province, where 83 out of 110 schools were affected, and in clashes between the Twa and Bantu communities in Tanganyika Province (8).

44. Armed groups were responsible for most of the attacks (121, or 90 per cent), which were attributed to CODECO (83 schools), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (11: 8 schools, 3 hospitals), Raia Mutomboki (6: 2 schools, 4 hospitals), ADF (5: 2 schools, 3 hospitals), Mai-Mai Mazembe (4 hospitals), non-identified Mai-Mai groups (4 schools), FRPI (1 school, 1 hospital), Nyatura (2 hospitals), NDC-Rénové (1 school, 1 hospital), FDLR (1 school) and Kamuina Nsapu (1 school). In total, 91 schools and five hospitals were deliberately burned or damaged as a result of intercommunal violence in Ituri (85) and Tanganyika (11). These incidents had a devastating impact on children's access to education across Ituri and Tanganyika, with at least 150,000 children affected. Another 17 schools and 15 hospitals were attacked for the purpose

of looting. Other attacks occurred in North Kivu (23), South Kivu (7), Sankuru (4), and the greater Kasai region (3).

45. Since August 2018, a new Ebola outbreak has affected a total of 944 children (454 boys, 490 girls) out of 3,310 recorded cases of Ebola in North Kivu, particularly in the territories of Beni and Butembo, Ituri and South Kivu. The international Ebola response was hampered as a result of attacks on Ebola health centres and workers by Mai-Mai Mazembe (4) and non-identified Mai-Mai groups (3), with at least seven attacks verified.

46. A total of 14 attacks on schools (7) and hospitals (7) were attributed to FARDC (12) and the Congolese National Police (2). The attacks include three incidents in Beni, where schools were damaged in the context of the response by FARDC to a political protest, and one school in Kasai Province, where members of the 2,103rd regiment looted a primary school and extorted teachers. FARDC also attacked a hospital in the Kasai Province, during which the 2,103rd regiment used force to arrest a suspected member of an armed group, who was hospitalized. Two hospitals were looted in Lodja, Sankuru Province, where the police was deployed to prevent a protest between factions supporting local politicians.

47. In addition, the country task force verified the military use of six schools and one hospital by FARDC (3), Nyatura (2), Raia Mutomboki (1) and Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (1) in South Kivu (3), North Kivu (2), Kasai (1) and Tanganyika (1) Provinces. For instance, in Fizi territory, South Kivu, close to an artisanal mining site, FARDC used a primary school to support military operations in that zone. Other uses of schools occurred in the context of the surrender of armed groups, as schools were temporarily used as cantonment sites.

E. Abduction

48. The country task force verified the abduction of 1,201 children (905 boys, 296 girls). The number of children abducted decreased, from 725 in 2018 to 439 in 2019 and 37 in the first quarter of 2020, reflecting a downward trend similar to the one witnessed with respect to new recruitment. The incidents were overwhelmingly attributed to armed groups (1,181, or 98 per cent). Most abductions were verified in North Kivu (898, or 75 per cent), where the violations peaked in 2018 (603), before declining in 2019 (269) and in the first quarter of 2020 (26), followed by Tanganyika (110), Ituri (86), South Kivu (76), the greater Kasai region (24), Maniema (5) and Équateur (2). Of note, abductions in the greater Kasai region significantly decreased to 20 in 2018, 4 in 2019 and zero in the first quarter of 2020.

49. Of the armed groups, the main perpetrators were Nyatura (394, or 33 per cent of abductions attributed to armed groups), ADF (138), Mai-Mai Mazembe (124), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (87), CNRD (78), Raia Mutomboki (73), FDLR-FOCA (52), NDC-Rénové (50), APCLS (22), Bantu militia (22), CODECO (19), FDLR (19), Kamuina Nsapu (15), Mai-Mai Malaika (14), Force populaire pour la démocratie (FPD) (11), Mai-Mai Kifuafua (9), non-identified Mai-Mai groups (9), FDLR-RUD (8), FRPI (7), Mai-Mai Charles (7), Mouvement acquis au changement (6), Bana Mura (5), Corps du Christ (2), Front démocratique congolais (FDC) (2), Mai-Mai Uhuru (2), Mai-Mai Yakutumba (2), AFRC (1), LRA (1), Mai-Mai Chandira (1), Mai-Mai Makanaki (1). For example, in an attack on Boga village in Irumu territory, Ituri, outside its regular zone of operation, ADF abducted 51 children who were used as porters to transport looted goods and medicines.

50. A total of 20 abductions were attributed to FARDC (15) and the Congolese National Police (5). In half of those cases (10), the violation was committed with the

purpose of committing sexual violence against the abductees. Other purposes included ransom and the extortion of money from families.

51. The violations of abduction and recruitment and use remained closely interlinked, with 980 children (81 per cent) abducted for recruitment purposes. A total of 142 girls (11 per cent) were abducted for the purpose of rape or other forms of sexual violence. For example, in a major incident in July 2019, Bantu militia elements abducted 20 girls in Tanganyika Province, five of whom were raped. All of the girls subsequently managed to escape. In other cases of abduction, some armed groups, such as Raia Mutomboki, Mai-Mai Malaika and ADF, temporarily used children to transport items when new camps were established and released them when the task was completed.

52. Through continued advocacy, the country task force successfully facilitated the release of 47 children during the reporting period, who had been abducted by Bana Mura in Kasai Province in 2017 for forced labour and sexual slavery purposes.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

53. The country task force verified 11 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access to children in South Kivu (5), North Kivu (3), Tanganyika (2) and Ituri (1). Incidents were attributed to non-identified Mai-Mai groups (4), Raia Mutomboki (2), Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (2), and Nyatura, Mai-Mai Mazembe and FRPI (1 each). For instance, in South Kivu, Raia Mutomboki elements attacked and abducted aid workers, hindering the distribution of vaccines to at least 5,000 children. In Tanganyika, Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale, which controlled the main route, was responsible for two attacks on humanitarian convoys carrying health supplies. It is estimated that at least 9,000 children have been affected by these denials of humanitarian access.

IV. Progress in addressing grave violations against children

A. Action plans and dialogue with parties to conflict

54. Following their delisting in 2017, FARDC and the Government continued to show ownership of the action plan signed with the United Nations in 2012 and to consolidate the gains in that respect through monthly interministerial joint technical working group meetings, chaired by FARDC. The mechanism was initially established to support the implementation of the action plan, and was used by the Government, FARDC, the United Nations and non-governmental organization partners to exchange views on and address child protection issues.

55. Seven joint technical working groups are operational at the provincial level, including in Kananga and Tshikapa, Kasai Central and Kasai Provinces, where they were established in 2018. Advocacy by the country task force, through these provincial working groups, on specific child protection issues resulted in concrete outcomes for children, such as the release of child hostages held by Bana Mura in Kasai Province or the release of children from detention.

56. A total of 8,015 new FARDC recruits were screened, 324 of whom were identified as children and separated before formal enrolment. The standard operating procedures on age verification adopted by the joint technical working group in 2016 has become a reference document used during the training of new FARDC recruits.

57. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remain listed for sexual violence against children in the annexes of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)). Progress in the

implementation of aspects of the action plan relating to sexual violence has been slower, although positive efforts relating to accountability were observed (see section on combating impunity).

58. The country task force has increased its outreach to listed and non-listed armed groups since 2018, contacting over 55 armed groups and factions. As a result, 31 armed groups' commanders signed a unilateral declaration and a road map committing to end and prevent child recruitment and use and other grave violations against children.¹ While the declaration is more of a political commitment, the road map contains 10 priority actions that commanders must undertake, including the provision of access to the country task force for age verification, the release of all children, and the designation of focal points, who play a central role in disseminating the message of zero-tolerance for child recruitment among the communities under the control of the signatory group. The road map is subject to monitoring by the country task force and its partners for an initial 12-month period after its signature.

59. Since 2018, 199 focal points and community mediators have attended awareness-raising sessions. Furthermore, commanders voluntarily released 1,790 children as a direct result of this engagement, which represents 24 per cent of the total number of children separated during the reporting period (7,456).

B. Combating impunity

60. In the framework of the implementation of the law on child protection of 2009, which stipulates that child recruitment is a crime punishable by up to 20 years' imprisonment, trials of commanders of nine armed groups were held during the reporting period. Two commanders, Shetani (FPD-Shetani) and Dominique Byenge Birihanze (Patriotes résistants congolais) were sentenced to life in prison and Marcel Habarugira (Nyatura) to 15 years, all for charges that included child recruitment. Other trials, including against Ntaberi Sheka, Nzitonda Seraphin and Jean Claude Lukambo of NDC-Sheka, Bigirabagabo, Noheri and Mudahunga of Nyatura, and Cobra Matata of FRPI have been ongoing, with some suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

61. The country task force advocated greater accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence against children and 181 elements of government security forces were arrested for this violation. In the first quarter of 2020, 13 FARDC soldiers in North Kivu (7) and South Kivu (6) were convicted, with sentences ranging between 5 and

¹ Mai-Mai Kifuafua, 11 July 2018; Raia Mutomboki (Ngubito faction), 20 July 2018; Nyatura (Faustin), 15 October 2018; Mai-Mai Bigaya, 18 October 2018; Mai-Mai Nyerere, 2 November 2018; Raia Mutomboki (Shukuru), 21 November 2018; Raia Mutomboki (Butachibera), 21 November 2018; NDC-Rénové, 25 November 2018; Kamuina Nsapu (Badibanga), 19 January 2019; Mai-Mai Kihebe, 26 January 2019; Nyatura-Collectif des mouvements pour le changement – Forces de défense du peuple (CMC-FDP also known as Nyatura (Domi), 26 February 2019; Mai-Mai Mazembe (Union de patriotes pour la défense des innocents – UPDI – Kitete), 26 February 2019; Mai-Mai Mazembe (Front patriotique pour le peuple/Armée du peuple – FPP-AP), 27 February 2019; Mai-Mai Kisokoma, 6 March 2019; Mai-Mai Yakutumba (Coalition nationale du peuple pour la souveraineté du Congo – CNPSC), 16 March 2019; Mai-Mai Kapapa, 6 May 2019; Kamuina Nsapu (Mbawu), 19 June 2019; Kamuina Nsapu (Tresor), 23 June 2019; Kamuina Nsapu (Tshinema), 24 June 2019; Kamuina Nsapu (Kadiambia), 24 June 2019; Force populaire pour la paix (former Raia Mutomboki), 6 July 2019; Mai-Mai Fimbo Na Fimbo, 11 July 2019; Mai-Mai Kashumba, 18 July 2019; Mai-Mai Mazembe (Union des patriotes pour la libération du Congo – UPLC), 23 July 2019; Raia Mutomboki (Mutusi Maji), 14 August 2019; Union des patriotes pour la défense du Congo (UPDC), 12 November 2019; Mai-Mai Kirimatavi, 18 November 2019; Mai-Mai Makanaki, 18 December 2019; Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (2 factions), 7 December 2019; Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale (3 factions), 19 December 2019; APCLS-Janvier, 19 March 2020.

20 years in prison for the rape of children. Four police officers in Kasai Province and two in South Kivu were convicted and sentenced to between 7 and 20 years for a similar charge.

62. With funds received from the Government of Belgium, training and technical support for joint FARDC/Congolese National Police and military justice investigations were provided to 473 FARDC officers, military justice actors, lawyers and non-governmental organization partners responsible for the protection of victims and witnesses.

C. Awareness-raising and mainstreaming of child protection

63. The country task force undertook awareness-raising initiatives to end and prevent grave violations against children. For example, at least 2,717 FARDC and police members, including prison guards, were trained on child protection and age verification in Kinshasa, North and South Kivu, Tanganyika, Ituri and the greater Kasai region. Some 2,986 community members, religious leaders, teachers and representatives of non-governmental organizations were reached through awareness-raising sessions. Information packages were distributed to influential community members, spreading the message that child recruitment is a crime punishable by law. In the greater Kasai region, two influential Kamuina Nsapu leaders held awareness-raising sessions for their commanders, reaching at least 235 commanders in the first quarter of 2020.

64. In June 2018, the Congolese singer Fally Ipupa became a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador, aiming to highlight the combating of child recruitment for a period of two years. He visited a transit centre run by a Congolese non-governmental organization and has been raising the issue through his concerts and interviews in the media. Three events to be held in North and South Kivu in March 2020 were cancelled owing to COVID-19-related restrictions.

65. In 2018, MONUSCO published a report, entitled “Our Strength Is In Our Youth: Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2014–2017”.² The report is being used for advocacy purposes.

66. In February 2020, the MONUSCO Force Commander issued a revised version of the Force Directive for the Protection of Children of 2014. The revised directive strengthens the inclusion of child protection in early planning stages of military operations, provides guidance on the Force’s interactions with children, includes the training of focal points on child protection, and a “do’s and don’ts” pocket card for when the Force interacts with children.

D. Programmatic response

67. The severe lack of funding for programmatic activities had a serious impact on the planned activities relating to reintegration, family reunification and assistance to child survivors of sexual violence. Since 2018, funding for such activities has consistently decreased. Consequently, reintegration support fell, from 2,039 children assisted in 2018 to 1,105 in 2019. At the time of reporting, over 4,924 children were awaiting reintegration support. In 2019, UNICEF worked with its partners to develop an innovative and individualized approach, based on context-specific evaluations of children. This effort, coupled with funding constraints, meant that only 1,105 children

² Available from <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/report-recruitment-and-use-of-children-armed-groups-drc-2014-2017>.

formerly associated with armed forces and groups were able to benefit from an individualized reintegration package.

68. UNICEF and its partners provided services to 7,707 boys and 1,607 girls, including children formerly associated with parties to conflict, and vulnerable and conflict-affected children from host communities. Almost half of the children received support to return to school, and 55 per cent received support to start socioeconomic activities. In addition, 3,870 boys and 1,074 girls formerly associated with parties to conflict were reunited with their families. Assistance was also provided to 202 boys and 3,460 girls who survived sexual and gender-based violence.

69. As a preventive measure against child recruitment and use, UNICEF supported childbirth registration within the 90-day legal period, and through supplementary judgments, when the 90-day period could not be met. Since 2018, UNICEF has also promoted the birth registration of 3,202 children released from armed groups, by providing them with birth certificates.

70. The country task force provided access for 561,354 children affected by conflict to quality education through the construction and rehabilitation of schools, the provision of temporary learning spaces and the distribution of education kits.

V. Observations and recommendations

71. I am encouraged by the overall decrease in the total number of grave violations against children described in the report, however I remain disturbed by the persistent high number of violations and by the number of children affected, in particular those affected by recruitment and use, abductions and sexual violence. I note that multiple armed groups committed the greatest majority of these violations. I nevertheless urge all parties to conflict to end these violations and uphold their responsibilities under international human rights and humanitarian law.

72. I welcome the continued commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to consolidate the gains of its action plan, signed in 2012, to sustainably prevent the recruitment and use of children by its armed and security forces, including through the institutionalization of measures and mechanisms therein. I also urge the Government to accelerate the implementation of aspects of the action plan relating to sexual violence against children, as the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other security forces remain significant perpetrators of this violation.

73. I am encouraged by progress made in relation to prosecuting perpetrators of grave violations against children, in particular those responsible for recruitment and use and sexual violence. I am further encouraged that prosecutions have included members of the government security forces. However, I urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to redouble its efforts to fight impunity for grave violations against children, in particular sexual violence, as a fundamental way to enhance the prevention of violations.

74. I condemn the ongoing recruitment and use of a high number of children by armed groups, despite a noted decrease, and I urge them to immediately cease this practice and release and hand over all children within their ranks to civilian child protection actors for their reintegration into their communities. I nevertheless welcome the communication with armed groups' commanders that have resulted in the release of hundreds of children. I commend the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for supporting such communication.

75. I am concerned at the ongoing killing and maiming of children, although in lesser numbers compared to my previous report ([S/2018/502](#)), who are often targeted on the ground of their ethnicity and affected in gruesome ways. I am concerned by the rise in intercommunal conflict, which takes a heavy toll on children. I urge all parties to refrain from targeting children, and civilians in general, and to take all necessary measures to minimize the effect of their operations on civilians, including children.

76. I am concerned by the ongoing prevalence of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to prioritizing accountability, I call upon the Government to ensure that survivors have access to the required services and assistance, as well as to justice.

77. I call upon the Government to ensure that in all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes and peace agreements with armed groups, the rights and protection needs of children are made a priority, including the unconditional release of children by armed groups. In this regard, I am encouraged that the peace agreement signed with FRPI in February 2020 calls upon the group to ensure the unconditional release of children as soon as possible.

78. I am very concerned by the severe lack of funding for long-term sustainable reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, thus increasing the risk of re-recruitment. I urge the donor community, together with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to increase funding for sustainable, timely and appropriate socioeconomic reintegration for children, so as to ensure that every child affected by armed conflict receives appropriate support.
