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Chair: Ms. Al-thani (Vice-Chair) (Qatar)

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In the absence of Mr. Blanco Conde (Dominican Republic), Ms. Al-thani (Qatar), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 64: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*)

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) ([A/77/41](#), [A/77/140](#), [A/77/143](#), [A/77/221](#) and [A/77/282](#))

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (*continued*) ([A/77/309-E/2023/5](#))

1. **Ms. Alameri** (United Arab Emirates) said that her Government attached great importance to the rights of children at the national level and had enacted a number of laws and policies to provide optimal protection for them, in line with best international practices. The United Arab Emirates was a global pioneer when it came to the protection and promotion of children's rights. It had issued decrees on the protection of the rights of the child and on the protection of children from violence within the family in 2016 and 2019, respectively. Every 15 March, the country celebrated Emirati Children's Day, which aimed at raising awareness of the rights of the child and the need to provide a safe environment in which they could reach their full potential.

2. Education was key to social progress. The Ministry of Education had established the Child Protection Unit to safeguard children at school and at home from all forms of exploitation and physical and psychological abuse. The State continued its efforts to develop strategies and policies related to children's rights, such as the national strategy for motherhood and childhood. A strategic plan for the rights of children with disabilities aimed to consolidate and coordinate national efforts to meet the needs of children with disabilities and to empower them.

3. The United Arab Emirates had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1997 and had also signed the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had launched an initiative to develop a database of indicators on children's rights that would be used in studies and future planning.

4. **Mr. Zavala Porras** (Costa Rica) said that fulfilling the rights of children was key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but many factors, such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change and prolonged conflict, especially in

Ukraine as a result of the invasion by the Russian Federation, had limited progress towards those targets.

5. The situation of children could be improved by taking a more holistic approach, by using science to produce reliable data that would offer insights and by giving children agency in issues affecting them. Costa Rica welcomed draft general comment No. 26 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, and encouraged the Committee to mainstream the universal right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in the draft.

6. Costa Rica had the honour of presiding the UNICEF Executive Board in 2022 and called on all Member States, through political leadership and the provision of adequate, flexible and predictable funding, to support the UNICEF mandate.

7. **Mr. Lenanguy** (Central African Republic) said that his country was committed to promoting a peaceful and open society, ensuring access to justice for all and establishing efficient and competent institutions at all levels. Although the Central African Republic had recently experienced one of the most serious crises of its history, the relative calm of late had allowed presidential and legislative elections to be held and a national reconciliation process to be initiated, which had increased public confidence in the Government but had also raised expectations concerning security, national reconciliation and development, which must be addressed to avoid a resurgence of tensions. As well as the various forms of violence, ill-treatment and exploitation to which children were still subjected in the country, the problem of child soldiers remained.

8. In a challenging context, the Government had taken a number of measures in recent decades to protect children, including the adoption of the Family Code and the creation of counselling and orientation centres to support women and children who had been victims of violence.

9. **Ms. Hama** (Niger) said that multiple, interconnected challenges had slowed progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and had had a particularly serious impact on children. The Niger was a party to numerous international instruments on the protection of children's rights, which it had implemented through a strengthened legal framework and the adoption of policies, in particular the 2013 national policy for the protection of children. However, many obstacles to achieving full respect for children's fundamental rights remained.

10. Her delegation deplored the increase in the number of serious violations against children in situations of conflict and encouraged all countries to adopt laws and policies focusing on the protection of children in situations of conflict, in line with international humanitarian law. In 2017, the Government of the Niger and the United Nations had signed a protocol on children associated with armed forces or armed groups, under which the Niger had committed to referring all such children found within its territory to UNICEF and its operational partners. In 2021, the Niger, together with Norway, had initiated and led the drafting process that resulted in the adoption of Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), in which the Council condemned attacks and threats of attacks against schools and civilians connected with schools. During the 2020–2021 academic year, such attacks had led to the closure of over 500 schools, a figure that had prompted the Government to focus on improving both the access to and the quality of education in the country.

11. **Ms. Font Vilagines** (Andorra) said that her country attached great importance to the promotion and protection of children and was particularly concerned by the impact of climate change and the global pandemic on children worldwide. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols were more relevant than ever and Andorra would shortly present its third to fifth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The country's second voluntary national review on its fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals had been presented in July 2022 and had included the situation of children in the country and the actions taken to support children internationally.

12. The school system in Andorra was characterized by its multilingualism, tolerance and inclusivity, reflecting the social cohesion of the general population. In 2022, all schools had participated in an environmental project based on the principle of education for sustainable development. During the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Andorra had introduced measures to ensure the continuity of teaching and to offer support to children with complex mental health problems.

13. Protocols for dealing with situations of risk to children and with cases of physical and sexual abuse of children were in place in Andorra and a national plan for children and young people had recently been unveiled. A youth parliament and children's councils had also been established to encourage their active and inclusive participation.

14. **Ms. Abraham** (Trinidad and Tobago) said that her country remained committed to ensuring the full

enjoyment of children's rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provided the core framework for the protection of such rights in Trinidad and Tobago and was complemented by national laws. A national policy providing long-term guidelines on appropriate laws, interventions and infrastructure for the protection of children's rights had been drafted and a strategy for reducing child poverty had been formalized.

15. In recognition of the unique needs and interests of children and their role as future contributors to the sustainable development of society, Trinidad and Tobago had collaborated with UNICEF to implement a programme that enabled children to be ambassadors for their rights and speak out on issues affecting them. Thanks to the programme, child ambassadors had educated some 14,500 people about children's rights and over 350,000 people had viewed presentations and documentaries on the subject.

16. A committee for tackling violence in schools had been established, a plan for preventing violence had been developed and a new management system for streamlining cases of child abuse and neglect had been launched, which would improve the child protection system in the country.

17. **Ms. Lortkipanidze** (Georgia) said that conflict continued to expose children to multiple forms of violence. Ukrainian children were enduring unprecedented violence as a result of the unprovoked and unjustified full-scale military aggression by Russia against Ukraine. Innocent civilians, many of them women and children, continued to die and flee their homes. Her delegation condemned the blatant violation of international law by the Russian Federation and the loss of life and human suffering that had occurred as a consequence.

18. The Government of Georgia had criminalized forced marriage in 2015 and made the coercion of a minor into marriage an aggravating circumstance. Amendments to the Civil Code passed in 2017 had set the legal marriage age at 18 years. The Code on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 2019, was one of the most important legal texts on which the country's child protection programmes were based. As part of national plans for child protection, a governmental strategy to protect children living or working in the streets from violence had also been developed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online tools and platforms had been used effectively to provide distance learning and thus uphold the right to education.

19. However, the illegal occupation of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions by Russia prevented children in occupied territory from enjoying all rights under the

human rights protection framework. The prohibition of education in the native language in those regions, for example, was a major concern.

20. **Ms. Heimerback** (Norway) said that worsening indicators on poverty, hunger, education and work pointed to a dire situation for children around the world. Climate change and the global hunger crisis affected children more than any other group and, in order to uphold the promise to leave no one behind, it was important to focus on those who were most vulnerable.

21. Given its role as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in 2022, Norway made it a priority to ensure better protection of children and their rights in conflict zones. Child protection needed to be mainstreamed in the work of the Security Council and decisions made within the United Nations system needed to be implemented at the country level. It was therefore vital that United Nations operations on the ground were sufficiently mandated, staffed and funded to protect children and to continue their monitoring and reporting processes.

22. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (Vancouver Principles) and the Safe Schools Declaration were as necessary as ever and Norway urged all Member States to ratify, endorse and fully implement those instruments. Noting that children were often treated as adults in counter-terrorism efforts, her delegation called for international human rights law to be upheld in the fight against terrorism and echoed the call of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for long-term holistic reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups.

23. **Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) said that his Government was grappling with a number of difficulties in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to a lack of funding for programmes providing health care and food aid to children. The suffering of Yemeni children had increased exponentially following the coup by terrorist Houthi militias, which recruited children into the military or placed them in summer camps where they were subjected to intensive brainwashing in extremist ideology. Furthermore, school curricula had been changed to propagate extremist sectarian ideologies and many children were being encouraged by militia leaders to leave school altogether in favour of the summer camps. Children had also been deprived of medical care

during the COVID-19 pandemic as militia groups did not acknowledge the pandemic. The cost of living had risen, which had led to the exploitation of children in the labour market. In addition, many Yemeni children had been killed or maimed by landmines planted in residential areas.

24. The Yemeni Government had adopted a number of measures to put an end to the phenomenon of child soldiers. It had launched a plan of action, established points of contact in the armed forces to stop the recruitment of children, and had organized training sessions on children and armed conflict for the members of relevant ministerial committees. Military instructions had been issued on the prevention of child recruitment. Inspection visits had been carried out at barracks and other military sites to verify reports of recruitment. The Government was currently working with the Supreme Military and Security Committee to establish a special child protection unit within the armed forces with the aim of educating officers on the rights of children in military operations and the application of international standards on the treatment of child detainees. Support had been provided for centres working to reintegrate former child soldiers into the community.

25. The control by terrorist militias of millions of children was a generational time bomb. If a high price had been paid in combating mere dozens or hundreds of terrorists elsewhere in the world, it could be imagined that subjecting more than 8 million children to brainwashing at summer camps and indoctrination centres would give rise to a generation of racist extremists, which left no hope of peaceful coexistence or tolerance.

26. Yemen hoped that assistance would be provided for the implementation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and for the promotion of rehabilitation programmes.

27. **Mr. Suleiman** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his country had implemented several initiatives to promote child development, such as the introduction of a policy on free education, and laws making it a crime to cause a child to leave education, including by impregnating a schoolgirl. Aiding, abetting or soliciting a school-age girl to marry carried a punishment of a heavy fine, imprisonment or both, and consultations were being held regarding plans to set the age of marriage at 18 years and to change inheritance laws that infringed on children's rights.

28. National guidelines on child protection had been shared with schools to prevent and respond to all forms of child abuse and violence, and mechanisms such as

support centres for victims and specialized units in police stations had been introduced. A social action fund had been set up to tackle poverty, and a national action plan for the elimination of violence against women and children had been implemented. In 2022, his Government had submitted its sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

29. **Monsignor Murphy** (Observer for the Holy See) said that any efforts to promote and protect the rights of children must be accompanied by measures to support and strengthen the family and to ensure that the home was a place of safety and peace.

30. Poverty, which had worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, made children more vulnerable to violations of their rights. Support should be provided to families in need, so that children were not denied their right to education and families and communities were aware of the risks of child labour, child marriage and trafficking in children.

31. In order to effectively promote and protect children's rights, his delegation called for the rejection of practices that reduced the human person to an object, such as abortion, child pornography and surrogacy, which required the child to be considered as the object of absolute desire, rather than seen as a gift.

32. **Mr. Nanga** (Gabon) said that, as children were some of the most vulnerable members of society, their rights should be guaranteed without distinction. They should have equal access to health care and education and should be protected from all forms of violence and exploitation.

33. The rights of the child and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were inextricably linked. The Penal Code of Gabon had been updated to include the provisions of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, so as to prevent offences committed against children. Other measures to strengthen the protection of children's rights included mechanisms to combat violence in educational institutions, free prenatal and postnatal care for women, the prohibition of early or forced marriage and the establishment of parliamentary subcommittees dedicated to children's rights.

34. **Ms. Sekamane** (Lesotho) said that her country's national policies had been strengthened in order to give children a healthier, safer and more dignified life and new legal instruments had provided protections for women and children. A law ensuring free and

compulsory education for children had helped to improve school enrolment and provide educational opportunities for all children.

35. Lesotho called for a holistic approach in the promotion and protection of children's rights and for international collaboration between development partners, the development agencies of the United Nations, international financial organizations and all Member States in order to improve living conditions for children, particularly in developing countries.

36. **Mr. Nunes** (Timor-Leste) said that children were the group at the highest risk of poverty, malnutrition and abuse and were disproportionately impacted by human rights crises. Nevertheless, the 2030 Agenda provided an opportunity to realize children's rights in all countries.

37. The rights of children were enshrined in the Constitution of Timor-Leste and a commission responsible for implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been established in 2014, which had introduced such measures as awareness-raising initiatives, the recruitment of child protection officers and the development of a national plan for the protection of children's rights. A school food programme was in place and aimed to improve school attendance and combat malnutrition. In collaboration with development partners such as UNICEF, progress had been made towards establishing child protection systems and encouraging children's participation in society. Nevertheless, women and girls remained vulnerable to violence and malnutrition was still high among children.

38. **Mr. Ipo** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that significant tangible process had been made regarding children's rights since the World Summit for Children. However, the present global situation did not offer guarantees of the full realization of children's rights, particularly in developing countries.

39. In addition to ratifying all principal international instruments relating to children's rights, Côte d'Ivoire had launched initiatives such as the introduction of free and compulsory education between the ages of 6 and 16 years; the adoption of a national action plan against child labour; the creation of a national committee to monitor efforts to combat trafficking, exploitation and child labour; and legislative measures criminalizing practices such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

40. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, increased efforts were required to reduce poverty and to guarantee well-being, especially that of children. In that connection, Côte d'Ivoire called on Member

States to work actively towards fulfilling the commitments made at the Transforming Education Summit.

41. **Ms. Moote** (Kiribati) said that, despite the ambition of the founders of the United Nations to end human suffering, violence and atrocities continued to occur. The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing humanitarian crises had increased children's vulnerability to violence, much as climate change and devastating nuclear testing had increased the vulnerability of children in small island developing States.

42. The main obstacle to the prevention of human suffering was the fact that people who had influence over others desired too much power, leading them to lose sight of the rights, dignity and value of human beings. It was only by tackling that mindset that United Nations entities would succeed in preventing violence and inhuman treatment against children.

43. **Ms. Salam** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the State of Palestine had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. A national committee to harmonize national laws with the provisions of international treaties had been established and laws on the protection of children and on the promotion of inclusive education had been adopted.

44. However, the ongoing occupation of the State of Palestine by Israel prevented the full realization of the rights enshrined in the Convention and led to grave violations of children's rights, such as restrictions on freedom of movement, arbitrary detention, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of access to humanitarian aid. Israel, as the occupying Power, did not respect its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and the State of Palestine would take all possible legal, political and diplomatic measures to protect children and their rights so that they could live in freedom, safety and peace.

45. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that children's fundamental rights must be upheld. However, children in Myanmar enjoyed no such guarantees and endured threats to their lives, restriction of their liberties and deprivation of their rights. They had been targeted in the military's terrorist activities, leading to cases such as the imprisonment of a 3-year-old girl and the fatal bombing of a community-based school.

46. The National Unity Government of Myanmar was working to ensure that all children in Myanmar enjoyed their inalienable rights, through measures such as protection for detained minors, the provision of help for children injured during protests and awareness-raising of fundamental rights, including children's rights. However, the military junta continued to commit atrocities and enjoy impunity for its actions. Verbal expressions of concern had not stopped it from violating human rights and Myanmar therefore called for more significant steps to be taken urgently, including immediate and decisive coordinated action by the international community and recognition of the National Unity Government as the legitimate Government of Myanmar.

47. **Ms. Al-Sinani** (Oman) said that the protection of children was of the utmost importance, in line with the country's commitments to regional and international instruments and with its norms, values and laws. According to the KidsRights Index 2020, Oman ranked second in the Arab world and twenty-first worldwide when it came to the protection of children. In cooperation with the private sector and civil society institutions, Oman had established child development institutions, a hotline for the protection and rehabilitation of children and their families, child protection committees and representatives, and child-friendly schools. Other partnerships between the Government, civil society and the private sector included the Children First Association and the Omani Women's Association, which enhanced the status of children in Oman in all aspects, including through the strengthening of laws and the implementation of Oman Vision 2040 and other national strategies.

48. Through national plans for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, Oman strived to establish an environment conducive to the enjoyment by children of all their rights. The protection of children was an important part of the human rights system in Oman and a pillar of its national policy, and was based on a conception of the individual as the basis of development. Children made up 44 per cent of the country's citizens and were therefore the future of the country.

49. **Mr. Etsan** (Congo) said that draft laws for the protection of children's rights had been introduced for approval in the Congo, including draft decrees that established prohibitions and age restrictions for work carried out by children, and conditions for the movement of children in and out of the country. A national action plan for the period 2022–2025 to improve the quality of life of Indigenous Peoples, including children, had been developed, which included

measures for training Indigenous teachers. A project to increase the access of Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable Bantu communities to social protection had also been successfully implemented in Lékoumou department. A number of institutions provided education for children with disabilities in the Congo and, with the support of UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a programme to ensure the continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic had been successfully implemented. A national system for the protection of children in rural areas was being trialled, and a decree had been drafted to establish a national commission to combat trafficking in persons.

50. **Ms. Idres** (Sudan) said that every child in the world should enjoy the fundamental rights to a proper education and a safe environment with access to the necessary health care and social services. The Sudan rejected all forms of violence against children, including the six grave violations. The Transitional Government of the Sudan strove to promote and protect children's rights and in particular to improve the situations of children affected by armed conflict. The Sudan was committed to implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and the Safe Schools Declaration.

51. The Transitional Government continued to develop laws related to the national strategy on the protection of children. It had also taken steps to implement a national plan to prevent grave violations of children's rights and to improve basic services for children in all regions of the country. In that regard, the Transitional Government would continue its cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and all related United Nations agencies.

52. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on education for children and young people owing to school closures, the digital divide and unequal access to digital learning platforms. The pandemic had also led to rising levels of poverty, which in turn gave rise to mistreatment, violence and child labour, especially in conflict regions or camps for displaced persons. The authorities had created innovative tools to ensure the delivery of educational services for all children, including the most vulnerable in conflict regions. More effective engagement was needed from UNICEF and relevant agencies as well as ongoing cooperation with government bodies in order to provide an environment conducive to learning.

53. The Transitional Government hoped that United Nations offices tasked with promoting children's issues

would increase their constructive engagement. Furthermore, they should pay greater attention to accuracy and objectivity in their reports and avoid generalizations and inaccurate information. There should be a greater focus on supporting the efforts of the Government in order to serve and protect the rights of children, especially those in conflict zones, so that their basic needs could be met. In that way, children could contribute to future development and prosperity.

54. **Mr. Lamce** (Albania) said that the situation of children in many parts of the world was dire, owing to conflict, violence and disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law. Albania called for decisive action to improve the situation of children through a human-rights based approach, and for increased funding for cross-sectoral child- and gender-sensitive protection and for the prevention of violence, including online violence.

55. Greater focus on prevention and accountability was needed in measures to protect children in conflict and post-conflict settings. Improved data on the situation and number of children affected by conflict was also necessary and regional United Nations representatives and entities would play a crucial role in its collection. In addition, within the United Nations system, children and their rights needed to be considered variously within the contexts of human rights, women's empowerment, the 2030 Agenda, the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the women and peace and security agenda. To that end, Albania called for improved coordination between different United Nations bodies. Albania also proposed strengthened partnerships with child protection practitioners and civil society organizations, whose experience and best practices would help to reinforce the efforts of the United Nations in implementing and improving its monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

56. The Government of Albania had strengthened its legislative and policy framework for child protection in 2017. A new law granted Albanian citizenship to all children born in Albania who would otherwise be stateless; the Minister for Education had issued guidelines on refugee and migrant children; and Albania had taken decisive steps to address the dire situation of women and children of Albanian origin in refugee camps in Syria and Iraq, including through repatriation measures.

57. **Mr. Feruță** (Romania) said that many children currently faced a grim reality, with thousands of child victims or survivors of grave human rights violations worldwide. Owing to the unprovoked and unjustified war launched by Russia in Ukraine, many more children

had become victims of violations such as sexual violence, torture and unlawful detention.

58. His Government had taken a multidimensional approach to offering support to Ukrainian refugees in Romania, a group that included a high number of children. Centres offering psychological and legal support to refugees had been set up in several cities and Ukrainian children had access to Romanian schools and to the national vaccination scheme. They also benefited from additional support measures such as free accommodation in school dormitories and emergency medical care. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, hubs had also been set up to ensure that Ukrainian children in Romania had continued access to the Ukrainian education system.

59. Romania had also continued to implement the provisions of Security Council resolutions [2272 \(2016\)](#), [2475 \(2019\)](#) and [2225 \(2015\)](#) and had continued to support States affected by landmines, the victims of which were often children.

60. **Mr. Greco** (Italy) said that the children and armed conflict mandate had become more relevant amid rising conflicts and violence around the world, which disproportionately affected children. Children, in particular those on the move, were often victims of offences such as trafficking, sexual violence and abduction. All perpetrators of grave violations against children must be held accountable.

61. Increased attacks on schools and children's facilities during armed conflict had put children's physical security and access to education at risk and, in tandem with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, had affected the psychological health of children and increased their long-term vulnerability. In order to break the cycle of violations against children, Italy called for a systematic and coherent approach that incorporated prevention, accountability and reintegration. It urged Member States to support the Safe Schools Declaration so as to mitigate the consequences of armed conflict on all aspects of education. Given the importance of integrating the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles into the wider peacekeeping agenda, Italy would continue to support key global actors in their efforts to ensure that no child was left behind.

62. **Ms. Knani** (Tunisia) said that her country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and had enshrined the rights of the child as inalienable in its national laws. As equitable, good-quality education was essential for the exercise of all other human rights, education was free and compulsory in Tunisia. Given the risks posed by school attrition, the

"second chance" programme had been launched for children who had dropped out of school before graduation, which helped them to continue their schooling, embark on vocational training or enter the labour market.

63. All forms of discrimination were prohibited by law, and measures and programmes had been implemented to ensure equality in the exercise of rights. The country did not discriminate between citizens and non-citizens and unaccompanied child refugees were afforded all rights. As free expression was important for fostering among children a sense of responsibility and investment in decision-making, the Government regularly consulted with them when formulating its policies and had created bodies to enable them to express their opinions on topics pertaining to their rights.

64. The Government had enacted laws to protect children in online spaces and to ensure the prosecution and punishment of abuse committed via the Internet. A draft law on the protection of minors in digital spaces would block violent and inappropriate content. Tunisia had created a mechanism and a national strategy to combat child trafficking, as well as the Child Protection Delegates programme, which intervened in situations where children might be in physical or psychological danger. The Ministry of the Interior had established units within the police and the national guard to investigate violence against women and children.

65. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the State had set up a free hotline to help to assuage feelings of isolation and fear among children. Tunisia paid special attention to adolescents, providing them with sexual and reproductive education and related health services. Tunisia had also coordinated with relevant United Nations agencies and had exchanged information and experiences related to children's rights with other States.

66. **Mr. Faiq** (Afghanistan) said that children in Afghanistan had suffered from multiple social, economic and political challenges as a result of conflict and, following the takeover by the Taliban in 2021, Afghanistan was now the worst country in the world for children to live. Children had not contributed to the conflict in the country but had nevertheless been exposed to grave violations, food insecurity and multidimensional poverty. Girls were banned from accessing secondary education and faced early marriage, honour killings, domestic abuse and sexual violence; boys faced military recruitment into armed conflict and sexual exploitation; and both boys and girls were exposed to hazardous labour practices and

landmines. Access to education was further limited by targeted attacks on educational centres, which had resulted in the deaths of many children.

67. Afghanistan therefore urged Member States and the wider international community to put pressure on the Taliban to lift bans on girls' access to secondary education and to form an inclusive and accountable system based on the will of the people, the rule of law and justice. While recognizing the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNICEF and other United Nations funds and programmes, Afghanistan also called for stronger mechanisms for documenting and reporting human rights violations, including violations against children.

68. **Ms. Mendez Gruezo** (Ecuador) said that her country's Constitution and laws guaranteed the rights of children, and gave those rights priority over the rights of others. Ecuador was committed to ensuring that children could overcome the educational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had disproportionately affected young people living in rural areas, migrants, ethnic and racial minorities and those in the most deprived socioeconomic groups.

69. Given that poverty and marginalization limited children's full enjoyment of their rights and increased the risk of malnutrition, an institution had been set up to tackle undernutrition. Ecuador had also focused on preventing, identifying and treating mental health problems in children and adolescents and on reducing adolescent pregnancy, ensuring the safety of children at home and in school, eradicating child labour and child begging and promoting universal access to the national health and education systems.

70. **Mr. Aryal** (Nepal) said that recent data had demonstrated that children were the group most vulnerable to any disaster, crisis or pandemic. His country's laws, policies and national plans ensured the protection, promotion and fulfilment of children's rights. The national child policy aimed to protect children by providing for their physical, mental and educational development, by ending discrimination and by strengthening the juvenile justice system. All children were guaranteed a free and compulsory basic education under the law. Marriage below the age of 20 years was prohibited by the National Civil Code Act and Nepal had adopted a national strategy that aimed to end child marriage by 2030.

71. A national council for children's rights was in place to provide policy advice and capacity-building programmes, and to run the national child protection system. Child labour had declined in the country and Nepal had committed to ending all forms of child labour

by 2025. Ending forced labour, trafficking in children and homelessness were also priorities for the Government.

72. Measures to promote education and the health of children and mothers included a national immunization programme across the country, including in remote, impoverished and marginalized communities, and a national strategy for early child development. Textbooks had also been prepared in numerous languages to encourage the retention and use of Indigenous languages by children in early education.

73. **Ms. Theofili** (Greece) said that her country remained strongly committed to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The focus of the new UNICEF country programme for Greece had shifted from humanitarian action to development, in line with the Secretary-General's strategic vision for the future set out in his report entitled "Our Common Agenda".

74. Greece had also made strong commitments to children's education and had participated actively at the recent Transforming Education Summit, particularly as co-lead of the action track focusing on how new technologies could make education more inclusive, equitable, effective, relevant and sustainable. Greece remained committed to the children and armed conflict mandate and had already ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). It had developed a national plan on women and peace and security, which included protections for girls affected by conflict. Lastly, Greece had established a Special Secretariat in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, to provide support and assistance to unaccompanied minors.

75. **Mr. Salah** (Libya) said that his country had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which had thereafter become an essential part of national law protecting the rights of the family and the child. Other relevant national legislation included a law enacted in 1984 that set the minimum marriage age for both men and women at 20, in order to protect minors from early marriage, a phenomenon that was now almost unknown in the country. Other relevant laws included the Children's Protection Act (1997) which explicitly

provided that a foetus in its mother's womb was considered a child with the right to life. The Libyan Penal Code criminalized the commission or promotion of abortion. All children of unknown parentage enjoyed full citizenship rights.

76. The High Committee for Childhood, established in 1997, was the body tasked with monitoring the implementation of relevant laws and with supporting public institutions and civil society organizations concerned with protecting the rights of children. The Committee had recently developed several important strategies to enhance such rights, including a national action plan to prevent and address violence against children and to provide services to victims of violence.

77. His delegation appreciated the cooperation between the UNICEF office in Libya and the High Committee for Childhood, especially when it came to studies and analyses of issues related to the rights of the child and capacity-building. In 2021, Libya had submitted its national report on the implementation of the Convention to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

78. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that, after the overthrow of the Government of Ukraine in 2014, the authorities in Kyiv had launched a campaign against the Russian language and dissent in the country, which had included depriving Russian-speaking children of the right to use and communicate in the Russian language in public. When residents of south-east Ukraine who disagreed with that policy had tried to realize their rights to freedom of expression and opinion and to freedom of peaceful assembly, Kyiv had sent radical nationalists to suppress the protests. The residents of Donbas had been forced to defend themselves. Kyiv had unleashed a full-blown civil war and subjected Donbas to indiscriminate shelling.

79. In Donetsk, the Alley of Angels was a memorial to the scores of children from Donbas who had been killed as a result of the shelling by the armed forces of Ukraine. Their number was constantly growing. Most recently, a 16-year-old girl had been killed in Donbas on 9 September 2022, three boys had been wounded in Makiivka on 10 September, a 6-year-old boy had been wounded in Donetsk on 14 September and three children had been killed in Kreminna and Krasnorichenske on 19 September. At the end of September, the armed forces of Ukraine had attacked two convoys of refugees trying to flee Ukrainian-controlled territory. Among those killed and injured had been children.

80. Most of the shelling of the civilian population of Donbas was carried out using weapons provided by the United States of America and other Western countries. Thus, the United States and other Western countries were complicit in the killing of children and other civilians in Donbas and in Ukraine. President Zelenskyy had repeatedly thanked Western countries for the weapons provided by them, which he had rated as highly effective.

81. Russia was not deporting children from Donbas but rather was saving them from the shelling by the armed forces of Ukraine and trying to enable them to lead a normal life and continue their studies.

82. Faina Savenkova, a girl from Luhansk, had been placed on Peacemaker, an infamous Ukrainian website. People listed on the site were killed.

83. **Mr. Setia** (India) said that the delegation of Pakistan had misused the forum in order to propagate false and malicious propaganda against India. Such frivolous remarks deserved contempt and were designed to distract the international community from the serious human rights violations being perpetrated in Pakistan against minorities, women and girls. Pakistan must stop cross-border terrorism so that the citizens of India, especially children, could exercise their right to life and liberty. The discussion at hand was extremely important and should be focused on strengthening international cooperation in the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

84. **Mr. Rashid** (Pakistan) said that the statement by Pakistan which the representative of India had called false and malicious had quoted from the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/76/871-S/2022/493). He wondered whether that report was also being called false and malicious.

85. Although children had been killed and subjected to violence in Pakistan in recent years, such violations, including the cowardly terrorist attack against the army public school in 2014, which had resulted in the loss of more than 130 innocent lives, had been due largely to attacks by terrorist groups. However, violations perpetrated in the territory occupied by India had been at the hands of the Indian State machinery. The loss of the lives of children was lamentable but, in all cases, such violence was either perpetrated or sponsored by India.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.