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- Chair:* Mr. Marschik (Austria)
- later:* Mr. Grünwald (Vice-Chair) (Slovakia)
- later:* Mr. Marschik (Austria)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 67: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/78/137, A/78/214, A/78/247, A/78/284 and A/78/366)

1. **Ms. Lyazidi** (Morocco) said that Morocco had adopted a clear vision for protecting and promoting children's rights, exercised in part through its national observatory on the rights of children. Through its Constitution, Morocco provided for equal legal protection and equal social and moral support for all children, regardless of family situation. Morocco had acceded to all international legal instruments on the protection and promotion of children's rights, had been one of the first countries to ratify all three optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was committed to harmonizing its domestic legislation with international human rights law. Morocco had ratified the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Safe Schools Declaration.

2. Morocco had hosted an international dialogue on child rights in humanitarian crises in March 2022 and had organized a meeting on the recruitment of child soldiers by armed militias in November 2022. The Moroccan Child Parliament provided children with a space for dialogue between themselves and with other stakeholders.

3. Morocco had launched local programmes in 10 cities, in line with a continent-wide campaign to protect street children inaugurated at the eighth United Cities and Local Governments of Africa summit, held in Marrakech. A programme dedicated to early childhood development had been launched as part of a national initiative for human development.

4. A help centre and hotline had been established to protect children from violence, neglect and exploitation and facilitate the reporting of cases. The Criminal Code provided for harsher sentences when the perpetrator of such offences was an older relative or guardian of the victim or had authority over the victim. Social protection coverage for children had been improved through the provision of free health-care access in public hospitals and benefits for school children between the ages of 6 and 15 years.

5. **Ms. Samai** (Algeria) said that her country had ratified many international and regional instruments on the protection of the rights of the child, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention,

1973 (No. 138), and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). The Government had enacted laws assigning primary responsibility to the State to protect children from all forms of harm, violence, exploitation or physical, psychological or sexual abuse.

6. A national agency for child protection had launched a hotline for reporting situations of danger to children and had provided training for 170 organizations that worked with children. A digital platform for the promotion of children's rights received some 10,000 calls a day, and a network was in place to provide specialized training on children's rights to journalists.

7. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had commended Algeria for its achievements in promoting and protecting the rights of all children, including the right to protection against exploitation and to free and compulsory education. All children in the country were enrolled in schools, more than half of whom were girls. UNICEF had also welcomed the country's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

8. Technological developments could have educational benefits but could also be misused. Algeria had enacted legislation to protect children from online risks, particularly sexual exploitation, and to establish preventive mechanisms. In June 2023, a national art and singing event for children had been attended by more than 2,000 children.

9. **Ms. Alabbasi** (Bahrain) said that her country recognized the importance of meeting the needs of children, protecting their rights, providing them with a safe environment, nurturing their talents and implementing national health, education and social protection programmes. Bahrain had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its optional protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

10. Bahrain, through the National Commission for Childhood, continued its efforts for the development of children of all ages. Bahrain had passed laws on restorative justice for children and on their protection from ill-treatment. A central body had been established to address reports of neglect or physical, psychological or sexual abuse of children.

11. To raise awareness of cybercrime against children, such as sexual exploitation, lectures were held, including in public and private schools. A unit had been established within the Ministry of Interior to provide

comprehensive protection for children in cyberspace and to educate children about the risks of the Internet and appropriate online practices. A Child Rights Commissioner had been appointed to deal with children's issues, to protect and promote the best interests of the child and to monitor the political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights of children.

12. **Mr. Zavala Porras** (Costa Rica) said that, 30 years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child had entered into force, Member States' obligations under it were yet to be fulfilled. Fulfilling the rights of children was key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but the multifaceted and lasting impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change and prolonged conflict had prevented progress towards those targets.

13. Costa Rica was concerned by the serious violations of children's rights in armed conflict, which was currently occurring in more countries than at any other point since the Convention had been adopted in 1989. Costa Rica called on all actors, particularly Member States, to respect international humanitarian law and human rights in all circumstances.

14. Some 1.7 million children under 5 years of age died prematurely due to environmental factors, around 160 million children lived in areas at risk of drought, 530 million lived in areas at risk of flooding and 115 million lived in areas at risk of cyclones. The destruction of biodiversity and natural resources also destroyed the lives of future generations. Costa Rica welcomed general comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change, and reaffirmed its support for the recommendations contained therein, particularly those relating to children in vulnerable situations, such as Indigenous children.

15. Costa Rica called on all Member States to accelerate efforts to guarantee the right of children to access the Internet and digital technologies and to protect children's integrity and well-being in the use of those tools. An intersectional approach and the voices, experience and full participation of children were needed to ensure adequate and adapted responses to the realities facing children and to end grave violations against them.

16. Costa Rica had had the honour of presiding over 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.

17. **Mr. Candia Ibarra** (Paraguay) said that the demographic dividend of Paraguay was increasing, and a third of the population was aged 17 years or under. Public policy was therefore needed to take advantage of development opportunities and strengthen the promotion and protection of children's rights. Under the Constitution, the responsibility for protecting children's rights was shared between family, society and the State.

18. The National Plan for Children and Adolescents for the period 2022–2024 focused on strengthening the role of the family, providing comprehensive protection to children and young persons, promoting children's rights and strengthening the National System for the Promotion and Protection of Children and Adolescents. Paraguay aimed to encourage children's full participation in their families and communities and in decision-making processes.

19. Ensuring the active role of the family as guarantors of children's rights and guiding the fulfilment of the family's responsibility was fundamental to the care, protection and development of children. A joint workplan, established by the Ministry for Children and Adolescents and the Public Defence Service, provided for the establishment of information exchange mechanisms and a unified database to improve the care and protection of children who were separated, or at risk of being separated, from their families. Staff from both Ministries would receive capacity-building to ensure an individualized approach to each specific case, and coordination between key actors would be strengthened.

20. **Mr. Valtýsson** (Iceland) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been incorporated directly into national legislation, and the Icelandic Government had introduced a holistic policy and action plan with regard to children's rights, which was also being implemented at the municipal level. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had commended the fact that children in Iceland could challenge custody cases and request the custody of another parent. However, challenges such as access to mental health services and combating violence against children remained.

21. Iceland would continue its support for UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to end child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Member States must work together to support and empower girls across the world and enable them to prosper, including by ensuring sexual and reproductive health rights, comprehensive sexual education and the rights to bodily autonomy, privacy and self-determination.

22. It was alarming to see a permanent member of the Security Council blatantly disregard its obligation under international law to protect children in armed conflict. Iceland deplored and condemned the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children from areas occupied by Russian armed forces.

23. Member States should take advantage of the opportunities that new technologies offered for children and adolescents but must also remain alert to the risks and threats they posed. Member States should take pre-emptive action to prevent the negative aspects of new technologies by targeting the root causes of negative social norms, gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, including by engaging and educating young men and boys to empower them to become agents of change for gender equality online and offline.

24. Progressive legislation in Iceland provided for paternity leave. Children had a right to enjoy that time with both parents and the lasting and invaluable bonds that were formed. Those in positions of authority should lead the way in guaranteeing paternity leave.

25. **Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) said that his Government had made efforts to implement national strategies to fulfil its commitments under international treaties on children's rights, including by protecting children from sexual abuse and recruitment and use in armed conflict. However, since the coup by Houthi militias in 2014, many government institutions had been destroyed, and programmes, strategies and policies related to the protection of children had been disrupted.

26. Yemen condemned the violations that the Houthi militias had committed against Yemeni children and the children of migrants and refugees. Children were dying of hunger, thousands had been recruited to be used in the armed conflict, more than 1,300 had been killed and hundreds more had been maimed. Although Yemen had signed an action plan with the United Nations, recruitment of children had continued, including through summer camps at which incitement to hatred and extreme ideology were forced on children. Those children needed to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into communities to help them recover from the psychological effects of war, to prevent them from engaging in future terrorist movements and to avoid future conflict and violations of children's rights.

27. His delegation called for the use of agreed definitions and language in reports of Special Rapporteurs and Special Representatives of the Secretary-General.

28. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that the situation of children's rights had worsened in Myanmar due to the

illegal military coup and atrocities committed by the military junta which, since February 2021, had arrested hundreds of children, many of whom were still in detention, and killed hundreds more. The junta had violated the fundamental rights of children to life, protection from violence, education, health, food, to have a relationship with their parents and to express their opinions. It had also attacked and burnt down several schools and had left over 3 million children out of education. The Expanded Programme on Immunization had been suspended in many parts of Myanmar and, in 2023, nationwide measles vaccination coverage had fallen from 91 to 34 per cent. Nearly 1 million children had not received their routine immunizations, and nearly 5 million children were deficient in Vitamin A.

29. Despite those challenges, the National Unity Government, together with ethnic resistance organizations and non-governmental organizations, provided online and offline education services and had opened schools on the ground and in some camps for internally displaced persons. The resumption of routine immunizations had begun in relatively safe areas for children under 12 months and pregnant women. Myanmar called for the international community, including agencies of the United Nations, to provide necessary support in an innovative way to enable wide and effective access to immunization programmes to prevent outbreaks and deaths from preventable diseases.

30. To end violations of children's rights in Myanmar, it was crucial to end the military dictatorship and restore democracy. He called on the United Nations and the international community to pay attention to the suffering of the people of Myanmar and to extend strong and effective support to end the military dictatorship before further children's lives were lost.

31. **Ms. Salem** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the State of Palestine had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ratified its optional protocols. A national committee to harmonize national legislation with the provisions of international treaties had been established.

32. Her country's efforts to achieve the justice, freedom, dignity and peace that all children deserved were undermined and its resources drained by the ongoing Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine, under which Palestinian children faced one of the most protracted protection crises in the world, with no end in sight. Israel killed Palestinian children's parents, demolished their homes, injured and maimed them, and denied them access to medical care. As a result, those children had to cross checkpoints to attend school, had to escape attacks and abduction attempts by terrorist

settlers and were illegally detained and imprisoned. Israel had disrupted children's education by demolishing schools, and many Palestinian children were waiting for permits to access life-saving medical care outside Gaza.

33. It was Israel that was putting Palestinian children in harm's way and had placed violent settlers and immoral soldiers in Palestinian towns and villages. Palestinian children were not killed on foreign land but on their own land, most of them by live ammunition to the head or chest, exposing a shoot-to-kill policy and blatant disregard for their lives by Israel. The State of Palestine called on the international community to urgently intervene, to save the lives of Palestinian children from the systematic targeting by Israel, to provide international protection to the Palestinian civilian population, to ensure accountability and to end the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine so that children there could finally live in peace.

34. **Mr. Niasse** (Senegal) said that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals was essential for ensuring the protection of children's rights. However, according to UNICEF, just 11 countries, accounting for 6 per cent of the global child population, had met 50 per cent of child-related targets. At that rate, 1.9 billion children in 140 countries would be left behind. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in September 2023 and the political declaration adopted in that context should be the impetus to reverse such trends. The international community should demonstrate its commitment to accelerating the promotion and protection of children's rights in the outcome document of the upcoming Summit of the Future and at the proposed world social summit in 2025, so as to ensure all children the full enjoyment of their rights.

35. To that end, it was essential to create new strategies for promoting a healthy environment, providing quality education, protecting children from all forms of violence and combating child illnesses and malnutrition. Developing countries should be supported in their efforts to build effective and resilient health-care systems, to establish accessible and functioning state services, to ensure equitable access to quality education and to protect children against risks associated with the use of information and communications technology.

36. Almost 20 per cent of the national budget of Senegal was allocated to education, with the support of bilateral and multilateral partners. As a result, almost 92 per cent of girls and 84 per cent of boys of elementary school age were receiving education. Senegal had introduced a free health-care system for children under 5 years, with positive results on child mortality rates. The national intersectoral committee for

child protection was piloting a national child protection strategy, and the Children's Ombudsperson and the National Children's Parliament had been established.

37. Senegal called on Member States to create a digital environment that was safe and child-friendly by encouraging multinational online providers to assume full responsibility with regard to children and strengthening parental control so as to combat abuse and sexual harassment of children online. Member States should safeguard the desire to live together with full respect for differences.

38. **Mr. Moriko** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the political will harnessed at the World Summit for Children in 1990 had led to progress in education, maternal and infant health and reductions in maternal and child mortality rates. However, conditions for children had gradually deteriorated, particularly in developing countries, and children were used as soldiers in armed conflict, sexually exploited and subjected to arduous labour. Persistent food crises leading to severe malnutrition, significant decreases in vaccine coverage and crises in educational systems had hindered the construction of a world fit for children. Member States should increase political support and the mobilization of resources for children.

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 a vaccination programme for all children; the adoption of a multisectoral national plan for nutrition including strategies for early childhood nutrition and to combat child malnutrition; 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 early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and child labour and trafficking.

40. The resources allocated to armed conflict were undoubtedly greater than those used to fund education and vaccines for children. Member States should mobilize resources for the well-being of children so as to ensure them a better future.

41. **Ms. Corquaye** (Ghana) said that, in many parts of the world, children and youth continued to face challenges, including harassment, online and offline bullying and physical and mental health issues, and continued to live in poor conditions, lacking food, education and other essential services. As the first country to ratify the Convention, Ghana continued to stand firm in its conviction that States had a solemn duty

to ensure the safety and preserve the rights of children. Member States should therefore recommit themselves to the objectives of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict and endorse the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups (Paris Commitments) and the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles).

42. Owing to the significant burden placed on children by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the international community's efforts to promote and protect the rights of children were needed more than ever. It was important for Member States to put children's health and well-being at the centre of their COVID-19 recovery plans and to provide children with the necessary support to help them heal and rebuild their lives. Affordable and accessible health-care services should be prioritized, and international organizations could play a significant role in supporting health infrastructure in underprivileged regions.

43. Child protection and enforcement laws provided a useful framework for supporting the efforts of Member States in addressing matters related to children. In that context, States should develop and commit themselves to enforcing strong child protection laws covering child labour, child marriage, trafficking in children and all forms of child abuse. In addition, measures must be taken to raise global awareness of children's rights through campaigns, education and advocacy and by engaging the media and civil society organizations so as to promote the importance of protecting children's well-being. In that respect, Ghana looked forward to the International Day of the Girl Child and its contribution to raising awareness of the rights of girls and contribute to ending discrimination and violence against them.

44. At the national level, the Ghanaian Government remained resolutely committed to safeguarding the rights of children in all facets of life and was undertaking education reforms that would transform teaching and learning and improve educational outcomes under the education strategic plan. Moreover, the Government was continuing the retooling of its child and family welfare policy, with a special focus on preventing violence against and the abuse and exploitation of children, and had stepped up its efforts to reduce the prevalence of child marriage and address the issue of streetism by creating shelters and rehabilitation centres for street children and providing them with educational and vocational training programmes.

45. **Ms. Arona** (San Marino) said that, since ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, her

country had been making the necessary efforts to fully apply the general principles of the Convention to its legal framework and to duly integrate the principles of the Convention in its policies and programmes. San Marino was strongly committed to the optional protocols to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It had made great efforts to safeguard children, including those with disabilities, and had been among the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its optional protocol. Moreover, San Marino was a traditional sponsor of the resolution on the rights of the child and sponsored many other resolutions on the protection of children. The realization of the fundamental right to peace, justice, equality and non-discrimination was essential for the construction of inclusive societies. The principle of leaving no one behind required the adoption of specific measures to support people in vulnerable situations. A key element of such measures was the promotion and protection of the rights of children and young people, who must grow up free from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

46. San Marino was greatly concerned about the high number of grave violations against children in 2023, with armed conflicts continuing to devastate children's lives and compromise their fundamental rights. Her country strongly condemned attacks on schools and hospitals and their use for military purposes. The increase in such attacks was unacceptable. Children's access to health care and education was a fundamental right that must always be preserved, and educational facilities should be a safe place for all children, students and teachers. In that context, San Marino reaffirmed its support for the Safe Schools Declaration.

47. The substantial increase in the recruitment and use of child soldiers was also of particular concern. Member States should ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and support other important tools, such as the Paris Principles, the Paris Commitments and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. San Marino supported the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and welcomed the new actions, plans and commitments that had been signed or were in progress.

48. **Ms. Beuzit** (Monaco) said that, despite the progress made, the Secretary-General's reports highlighted the lack of respect for children's rights. Violence against children, the sale and sexual exploitation of children and the issue of children and

armed conflict remained unacceptable failures and priorities for States. Moreover, many children were growing up in a digital environment that offered countless opportunities for learning and development but also entailed many risks, which States needed to minimize and prevent by raising children's awareness of online safety standards and protecting their rights and personal information. During the fifty-second session of the Human Rights Council, which had addressed the issue of children's rights in the digital environment, Monaco had highlighted the need to strengthen its legal framework through the law on combating harassment and violence in schools, which should take account of the new forms of such phenomena in the digital context.

49. A particularly serious violation of children's rights in the digital environment was trafficking in children, which included illegal deportations, forced transfers and other forms of violence, particularly in conflict zones. The issue of family reunification and the return of Ukrainian children transferred to the Russian Federation and Belarus, for example, was of paramount importance. As co-chair of the Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace, Monaco had recently supported the organization of a side event during the high-level week of the current session of the General Assembly, which had focused on technological solutions for tackling the exploitation of and trafficking in persons in sports. At the side-event, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) had reported on the impact of trafficking in children in sport, which had revealed an extremely grave situation. In that context, it was essential for States to press for relevant language to be added to the resolution on trafficking in persons to enable UNODC to gather more data on the subject. Sport had considerable potential for development but was often exploited for illegal purposes. It was therefore imperative to protect children by investing in research and education and enforcing regulations.

50. Monaco was actively committed to investing in children's health and education. The Prince Albert II of Monaco School in Haiti would celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2023. The Monaco Collectif Humanitaire provided health care to children from developing countries and had come to the aid of more than 500 sick children. Moreover, La Fondation Princesse Grace de Monaco was helping to improve hospital conditions for children and supported various paediatric medical research projects and the modernization of health infrastructure. Monegasque Cooperation for development was involved in a wide range of projects in support of the Sustainable Development Goals in the fields of child protection, health, food safety and education. Recent initiatives included those in Madagascar and Mali.

51. **Ms. Mokono** (Papua New Guinea) said that it was worrying that the world was becoming more hostile and unsafe for children. States therefore needed to do better to safeguard and promote the rights of children and to empower them to become torchbearers of a better future. As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Papua New Guinea remained committed to ensuring that the fundamental rights and protection of children remained at the heart of its development priorities. In that context, her Government had adopted and continued to improve national legislation and policies to ensure that better protection measures were put in place to cater for the rights of children, including the Lukautim Pikinini (Child) Act of 2009, the Family Protection Act of 2013 and the Criminal Code (Sexual Offences and Crimes against Children) Act of 2002, which addressed issues relating to violence against children, sexual exploitation, child labour and child pornography. In addition, the Government had recently launched a five-year medium-term development plan, which included strategic priority areas relating to quality basic primary education and family and social protection.

52. At the international level, Papua New Guinea was committed to implementing the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) of the International Labour Organization and was working with the United Nations human rights treaty bodies on its outstanding reports on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

53. Education was a right that belonged to all children. In that regard, Papua New Guinea was committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 by ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all, as clearly demonstrated by its national education plan for the period 2020–2029. Early childhood education had become an integral part of her country's efforts to ensure that all children in Papua New Guinea were provided with an opportunity to advance their learning at the earliest stage in order to prepare them well for entry into formal education.

54. With regard to children's health, with the valuable support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other key development partners, Papua New Guinea was working to increase and strengthen infant and young child survival programmes, including by expanding immunization coverage to all of the country's 22 provinces.

55. **Monsignor Murphy** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the promotion and protection of the rights of

the child could not be separated from measures to support and strengthen the family, since the family was the natural and fundamental group unit of society and was entitled to protection by society and the State, as recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, any discussion of children's rights must be linked to the family. Indeed, a society that promoted the protection of the child promoted the well-being of the family. A child's development, sense of identity and belonging, health, education and success in adulthood were closely linked to the resources that families had at their disposal to enable children to flourish as human beings. For that reason, policymakers should provide programmes that supported and complemented parents, rather than ones that replaced them.

56. A child needed safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, both before and after birth. At a time when medicine had the capacity to provide life-saving treatment to preborn children, it was also used to end the lives of some 73 million children annually through abortion, prenatal sex selection and eugenic abortion, thereby victimizing girls and children with disabilities. In addition, genetic selection occurred through the screening of embryos used in assisted reproduction, including surrogacy, which reduced the child to a mere object to be used to satisfy the wishes of adults rather than a gift to be welcomed and cherished. Such practices were incompatible with respect for the dignity and rights of the child.

57. With children growing up in a far more technological world than previous generations, with all the associated opportunities and risks, the challenge was to make sure that children had safe access to technologies while also ensuring their healthy and serene development and protecting them from unacceptable criminal violence or grave harm to the integrity of their body and spirit. Technologies could facilitate child exploitation and trafficking in children as well as remote child abuse, including sexual abuse. In that regard, the Holy See condemned in the strongest possible terms the production, distribution and use of child pornography, facilitated and accelerated by information and communications technology.

58. While the first concern of the Holy See was for the children that were directly victimized in the production of such materials, it was also worried that, as technology advanced, generative software allowed for the creation of simulated images of child sexual abuse, which further drove the demand for such materials and could make it harder to both identify victims and prosecute offenders. The dramatic growth in adult pornography in the digital world, which was increasingly accessible to children, was also a source of concern, as it sexualized children

at a young age, imprinted on them an improper conception of loving human relations and led to a general loss of the sense of human dignity. It was therefore essential to educate both children and their families to ensure the safety and protection of the child in the digital world. Such education should be based on knowledge of and respect for the equal dignity of every person and aim to prevent and address cyberbullying and teach children when and how to seek help from parents, other family members and teachers.

59. **Mr. Ahuka Lutundul** (Democratic Republic of the Congo), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the young people of his country, who had been raised to respect the principles underlying the Charter of the United Nations, including that of sovereignty, non-interference in the affairs of States and the inviolability of borders inherited from colonization, strongly condemned the armed groups and international actors who fuelled conflicts around the world, as well as those who exploited the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the detriment of its people. The international community must take immediate action to put an end to those practices and to related impunity.

60. He called for lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that was not just the absence of conflict, but also the presence of justice, stability, national reconciliation and sustainable development. The country could prosper so long as peace and security were guaranteed. In that context, the international community should support his Government's efforts to achieve a peaceful and sustainable solution in the east of the country, which required a firm commitment from the United Nations decision-making bodies to the ongoing peace process, which had been deliberately blocked by Rwanda and Mouvement du 23 mars in an effort to plunder his country's natural resources.

61. Although the situation of children and youth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was critical, it was not hopeless. By working together, investing in education, restoring security, promoting employment and encouraging the political participation of young people, it would be possible to pave the way for a better future for the country's youth. Economic opportunities for young people must be promoted, particularly through vocational training and support for entrepreneurship, which would help break the cycle of poverty and foster sustainable economic growth. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had undertaken major reforms to its education system to guarantee quality education for all, with young people receiving free primary education, regardless of their place of birth or social status.

62. *Mr. Grünwald (Slovakia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

63. **Ms. Font Vilagines** (Andorra) said that, although States were clearly interested in protecting and promoting children's rights, they must not let their guard down but work tirelessly to continue creating the best environment for the well-being of all children. States must be able to guarantee that children's needs in terms of nutrition, comprehensive health care, quality education, safety and environmental and climate security, among other things, were met at all stages of their development. Furthermore, States had a common responsibility to guarantee the rights of children and of the generations to come. In that context, Andorra was greatly concerned about the alarming circumstances of children in situations of armed conflict, displaced persons and refugees and the effects of climate change and the pandemic on children worldwide, especially girls, who remained even more vulnerable and exposed.

64. Andorra had submitted its combined third to fifth periodic reports ([CRC/C/AND/3-5](#)) to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2023 and regularly contributed to UNICEF. At the end of 2022, her country had allocated, as part of a multi-year programme in Bhutan, €300,000 for the most vulnerable children and adolescents so that they could benefit from high-quality, inclusive and gender-sensitive protection services. In addition, as part of its ongoing cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Andorra would make a voluntary contribution towards the publication and presentation in autumn 2023 of the report on the impact of climate insecurity on children and armed conflict. The visit of the Special Representative to Andorra in June 2023 had not only provided an up-to-date picture of the overall situation of children in the country and highlighted ways forward in the promotion and protection of children but had opened up new avenues of cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative.

65. Her country had a multilingual and inclusive education structure made up of three public education systems, and all Andorran schools participated in the Green Schools project, while children made their voices heard in the decision-making bodies of local authorities throughout the country and in the national Parliament. Andorra was also working to strengthen health mechanisms in all areas relating to mental health through the implementation of screening plans and action programmes and to enhance its legislative framework and the effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

66. *Mr. Marschik (Austria) resumed the Chair.*

67. **Ms. Tambwe** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her country valued the right of children to a good life, health and quality education and care. In that regard, the Tanzanian Government had continued to provide for and protect children's rights in line with its Constitution, laws, policies and guidelines, including through the establishment of integrated and multisectoral child protection services and community development so as to provide care for vulnerable children and to provide them with a holistic package of services.

68. As education was an essential tool for children's well-being, the Government provided children with free quality education from nursery to high school, which had led to an increase in the gross enrolment ratio. In the same vein, the Government had adopted a re-entry policy for pregnant schoolgirls to ensure that they had continued access to formal education and were not left in a vulnerable or at-risk situation after becoming pregnant. Furthermore, any person found guilty of impregnating a schoolgirl would be liable to imprisonment for 30 years. Health was another important aspect of children's rights. In that connection, the Government had made great headway in addressing maternal and child mortality, having reduced the newborn mortality rate to 7 per 1000 live births. In addition, the immunization rate for children under 5 years had reached 90 per cent.

69. The right of children to be heard and participate in all decisions that affected them was recognised by Tanzanian law. The Government had therefore established child-led junior councils from the village to the national level that contributed to the delivery of local services to children. In addition, the Government had significantly expanded its free birth registration programme for children under 5 years of age, which had greatly contributed to raising the overall certification rate to over 65 per cent in 2022.

70. **Mr. Aydil** (Türkiye) said that, while notable progress had been made in the three decades since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, significant challenges remained, in particular for girls, children with disabilities and children in disadvantaged and vulnerable situations. Furthermore, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children had noted in her report ([A/78/214](#)) that the world was not on track to keep the promise made under the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development to end all forms of violence against children. The international community must display robust political determination and take concerted action to address the situation of children in all settings.

71. Türkiye was more than ever committed to promoting and protecting the rights of children and was dedicated to upholding the best interests of the child in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. It attached particular importance to the rights of the girl child, ensuring education opportunities for all children, closing the gender gap in all spheres of life and ending early and forced marriages. Türkiye was a party to the Convention and its optional protocols, pursuant to which it had submitted combined fourth and fifth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

72. In the national context, significant steps had been taken in recent years to improve the legal and institutional framework. The National Programme to Combat Child Labour set out comprehensive measures to eliminate child labour and focused on such priority groups as children working on the streets, children employed in heavy and dangerous work and those employed in migratory and temporary agricultural work. In April 2023, the Government had published its Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan for the next five years, which aimed to address services for children affected by disasters, crises and emergencies.

73. The findings in the Secretary General's report on children and armed conflict (A/77/895-S/2023/363) were testimony to the fact that terrorism had been taking a huge toll on children. During the reporting period, verified cases of recruitment and use of children by the Syrian Democratic Forces, dominated by the Syrian extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), had increased almost threefold. Verified cases of the killing and maiming of children by that terrorist group had also increased sharply. The same tactic was used by the PKK terrorist organization in Iraq and Türkiye. It was noteworthy that the report referred to the forceful recruitment and use and abuse of children as young as 11 years of age by the PKK, as well the killing of children in Iraq. In addition, large movements of migrants and refugees across borders had created further impediments to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. As the largest refugee-hosting country in the world, Türkiye had, on various occasions, already shared with the international community its experience regarding children who had sought refuge in the country.

74. **Ms. Al Jaradi** (Oman) said that all States should provide the necessary support to UNICEF so that it could continue its efforts to protect children throughout the world. Children represented a real investment in the future and were essential to the achievement of sustainable development. The Omani Government had therefore enacted legislation to protect the rights of children and enable them to express their views so that

they could play a positive role in national development and shape the future.

75. Oman had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had established a special committee to organize events and activities related to the International Year of the Child. A national committee for the care of children had also been established, which had been responsible for drafting the Child Law of 2014. Pursuant to that law, which enshrined the right of children to education, Oman prohibited any material or practice that might be harmful to children's physical or psychological well-being and outlawed the employment of children in any work that might harm them. The law also protected the rights of children with disabilities and provided them with equal education and training opportunities through centres for persons with disabilities. In addition, article 37 of the Social Protection Law stipulated monthly benefits for children under the age of 18 years and placed the rights of children within the social security system on an equal footing with all other groups in society.

76. Concerned about the plight of children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the systematic violations of their rights at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces, Oman urged the international community not to turn a blind eye to the suffering of Palestinian children and to hold the Israeli authorities to account for their practices, which violated the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Measures must be taken to promote the rights of Palestinian children and provide them with the international protection they needed in accordance with the provisions of international law.

77. **Ms. Pierre Fabre** (Haiti) said that her country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols. Although efforts had been made to promote and protect children's rights since the adoption of the Convention, much remained to be done. At the opening of the ninety-second session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had noted that there had been a sharp decline in respect for child rights around the world. According to the latest data, children accounted for 41 per cent of the more than 100 million displaced people around the world.

78. The situation in Haiti remained unchanged, with children's rights to life, education, drinking water, sanitation, health and nutrition under threat. In fact, the country was facing a serious multidimensional crisis characterized by, among other things, violence, natural

disasters and the consequences of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which had a negative impact on respect for children's rights. During the pandemic, the majority of Haitian children had not had access to online education. Moreover, the resurgence of cholera posed a risk to the health, well-being and lives of millions of children. According to UNICEF estimates, several thousand children under the age of 5 years were suffering from acute malnutrition. In addition, as a result of growing insecurity, the majority of children in the West Department, particularly in the capital, had not been to school since the start of the new school year. Those challenges had exacerbated the already precarious situation of the country's poorest people.

79. The Haitian authorities had taken a number of short-term measures to remedy the situation. In December 2021, the Government, through the Ministry of Education, had launched a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of education, which encouraged the population to mobilize for the reopening of schools. In addition, a school canteen programme had been introduced in all public schools, particularly those in marginalized areas. The Haitian Government was committed to improving the juvenile justice system, preventing family separation by helping families to assume their responsibilities towards their children, and decentralizing essential child protection services.

80. The issue of children's rights must be tackled holistically, taking all dimensions into account. To that end, it was essential that decision-makers, whether at the national, regional or international level, took the right decisions in the face of the numerous existing challenges. In Haiti, the first step was to re-establish a climate of security. For that reason, the adoption of Security Council resolution [2699 \(2023\)](#) authorizing the deployment of a multinational security support mission was an important and decisive step towards restoring peace and stability. Those were sine qua non conditions that would enable the Haitian authorities to better address issues related to the protection of and respect for children's rights.

81. **Ms. Dabo N'diaye** (Mali) said that her country had made the protection of children's rights a priority and had acceded to most of the international and regional legal instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights in general and for the protection of children in particular, notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

82. At the institutional level, the Malian Government had established a ministry responsible for children's

issues; given a voice to children through the establishment of a children's parliament in 1996; built infrastructure for children's development; and set up programmes to ensure the full promotion and protection of the rights of women and children in Mali. At the same time, despite the complex security situation in the country, the Government was working to ensure that children enjoyed their fundamental rights. For example, access to quality education was guaranteed for all children, regardless of their gender, ethnic origin or economic situation. In the same vein, steps were being taken to overcome such persistent challenges as the lack of school infrastructure, the low school enrolment rate for girls and the need to make schools in conflict zones safe. With a view to keeping children in school and improving their health, school canteens had been set up in several public schools, with a particular focus on rural areas.

83. In terms of health and nutrition, programmes were being rolled out with the support of partners to improve children's access to quality health care, immunization and better nutritional care, thereby considerably reducing the prevalence of child malnutrition. In addition, steps had been taken to protect children from such harmful practices as child labour, domestic violence, genital mutilation, early marriage and trafficking in children, and improvements had been made to birth registration so that children could obtain the legal identity they needed to access basic administrative services and attend school. Determined to provide the necessary protection for Malian children, the Government was working hard to strengthen its juvenile justice system, especially for children in conflict zones. In that context, the Criminal Code had been revised accordingly.

84. **Mr. Espiritu** (Sovereign Order of Malta) said that the sale and sexual exploitation of children was an abhorrent violation of human rights that called for swift and resolute action from the international community. Every child had the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment, free from the horrors of exploitation and abuse. Nevertheless, millions of children around the world continued to suffer at the hands of traffickers and predators. Trafficking in persons lay at the heart of the problem, as it fuelled the demand for child exploitation and drove the heinous trade in child prostitution and child pornography. States must therefore resolve to combat trafficking in persons with unwavering determination. Strengthening international cooperation and stepping-up law enforcement efforts were critical steps in dismantling the criminal networks profiting from such heinous acts. In addition, States must prioritize the identification and rescue of victims,

ensuring that they received the support and care necessary to rebuild their lives.

85. States must also confront the growing challenge of online exploitation, where child pornography and sexual abuse material were disseminated with alarming ease. Innovative measures were needed to address that digital scourge and to hold accountable those who used technology to perpetrate such crimes. The unregulated use of artificial intelligence and the digitalization of real individuals into hybrid android caricatures and the use of real children in that way was of particular concern. In its commitment to upholding human dignity and protecting the vulnerable, Malta was actively engaged in the fight against child exploitation and trafficking in children. That fight required a united front, however. States must therefore redouble their efforts in preventing and combating the sale and sexual exploitation of children, invest in education and awareness-raising campaigns to empower children and their communities with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves, and strengthen their legal frameworks to ensure that perpetrators faced the full force of justice and could not practice their illegal craft under the cover of artificial intelligence.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

86. **Ms. Qureshi** (Pakistan) said that Indian diplomacy was defined by big lies, deflection and disinformation. India was not the largest democracy but the largest hypocrisy, deploying weapons of mass disinformation against Pakistan, minorities in India and innocent Kashmiris. Such action might help the Hindutva zealots to garner support from Hindu fundamentalists, but it would neither lead to peace in South Asia nor help them win respect from the international community. The biggest lie was that Jammu and Kashmir was a part of India. That would never be. It was a disputed territory, as attested by United Nations maps. The Security Council had decided in its resolutions that the final disposition of Jammu and Kashmir should be determined by its people through a plebiscite supervised by the United Nations. India had accepted that decision and was bound to comply with it, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations. India must withdraw its occupation army of 900,000 troops and allow the Kashmiris to freely decide their future in accordance with the Security Council resolutions.

87. Since the Hindutva-inspired unilateral and illegal action of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh/Bharatiya Janata Party on 5 August 2019, referred to as the final solution by Hindutva zealots, the occupation forces had escalated war crimes, crimes against humanity and the

genocide of Kashmiri Muslims. In incredibly intolerant India, secularism was sacrificed at the altar of Hindutva ideology espoused by Hindu fundamentalists, who enjoyed State office, patronage and protection.

88. Systematic discrimination and hate crimes against and the persecution of more than 200 million Muslims had permeated into political discourse and State bodies in India. Public calls for the genocide of Muslims, pogroms against thousands of innocent Muslims in Gujarat, Mumbai and Delhi, forced conversions to Hinduism, lynchings by cow vigilantes, the desecration of hundreds of mosques, including the Babri Masjid, and the building of temples in their place, the imposition of the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act and “love jihad” laws and hate speech by political leaders calling Muslims the “green virus” had become the new normal in India. The inhuman massacre of Christians by Hindu tribes in north-east India over the past few months had been appalling. Millions of Dalits were dehumanized, and Sikhs were persecuted. In fact, the terrorist franchise of India had gone from regional to global, where terrorist acts were committed against minorities, the people of Pakistan and Indian nationals living abroad. India should reflect upon the deeply troubling path it had taken, rather than point fingers at others.

89. **Ms. Ahangari** (Azerbaijan) said that the fabrications about so-called ethnic cleansing disseminated by the representative of Armenia contradicted the statement made by his own Prime Minister, who had admitted publicly that the rumours about mass casualties among the civilian population were not true and that there was no direct threat to the civilian population in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

90. It was ironic that Armenia, which bore full responsibility for unleashing the war against Azerbaijan and had committed heinous crimes during the conflict, including ethnic cleansing on a massive scale and the forcible displacement of 700,000 Azerbaijani citizens, had all of a sudden become a staunch supporter of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. Hundreds of Azerbaijani children had been lost as a result of Armenian aggression over the past 30 years. Although international law prohibited the taking of civilian hostages, 92 children had been taken hostage by Armenia. Moreover, just three years ago, Armenia had conducted military strikes on residential areas in Azerbaijan, killing 12 children and injuring 16. The youngest victim had been only 10 months old. Regardless of the falsehoods disseminated by Armenia, Azerbaijan was firm in its determination to rehabilitate and reconstruct its conflict-affected territories, ensure that refugees and internally displaced persons could

return to their homes in a safe and dignified manner, advance the normalization agenda and reintegrate ethnic Armenian residents of its Karabakh region so as to strengthen peace and stability in the region.

91. **Mr. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that his delegation strongly rejected all attempts by the Azerbaijani delegation to justify the vile atrocities that had been committed in Nagorno-Karabakh. Following the attacks on the region by Azerbaijan and a ten-month blockade, which had left people starving, in violation of international humanitarian law, none of the 100,000 Armenian civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh remained. It was therefore clear that the region had been ethnically cleansed.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.