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## Third Committee

### Summary record of the 11th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 5 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Marschik ..... (Austria)

## Contents

Agenda item 67: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

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*The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.*

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

1. **Ms. Gamba** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), introducing her report (A/78/247), said that in 2022 the United Nations had verified more than 27,000 grave violations against children in armed conflict situations, including high numbers of cases of killing and maiming, recruitment and use, denial of humanitarian access and abduction. Compared to 2021, attacks on schools and hospitals and their personnel had surged by 112 per cent.

2. The risks to and vulnerabilities of displaced children was a cause of concern. Displacement fomented the commission of violations and abuses, including the recruitment and use by armed groups and abduction, sexual violence and trafficking in children. Where children were displaced, health and education were often disrupted and humanitarian assistance was denied. Climate shocks in conflict-affected areas further exacerbated displacement, while risks of killing and maiming to displaced or returning children in areas contaminated by mines and explosive ordnance presented a real danger. Given that context, data collection was critical. To close information gaps, her Office had researched the impact of armed conflict on children with disabilities and that of climate insecurity on children affected by armed conflict. Her Office was also working in cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children to study links between trafficking in children and the six grave violations.

3. A Memorandum of Understanding had been signed by her Office and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to exchange expertise on education in the reintegration of conflict-affected children. During her visits to Colombia, Ethiopia, Israel and the State of Palestine, Mozambique, Ukraine and the Russian Federation, she had followed up directly on the realities faced by children and had supported Governments and regional organizations in determining ways to prevent and end violations. In May 2023, her Office had organized, jointly with the League of Arab States, a regional conference in Doha on the prevention of grave violations against children. In June 2023, she had participated in a conference in Oslo on children and armed conflict and met in Addis Ababa with the Special Envoy on Youth of the African Union.

4. In 2022, the successful engagement of the United Nations with parties to conflict had resulted in the

release of over 12,000 children, and had led to the adoption of new legislation and accountability measures. Her Office had conducted dozens of capacity-building workshops, including a virtual summer school with the University of Malta to deepen the child protection expertise of the United Nations, Governments, regional organizations, United Nations country task forces, non-governmental organizations and academics.

5. It was important to remember that all persons under 18 years of age were entitled to the protections enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including rights to education and documentation. Erosion of the international protection frameworks posed a grave threat to children's rights, particularly for older children, who were often treated as adults or subjected to counter-terrorism measures at the risk of having their own rights as children curtailed. The protection of children needed to be addressed across the humanitarian-peace-development-human rights nexus.

6. **Mr. Lang** (United States of America) said that the number of children who had been affected in 2022 by conflict, including by the six grave violations, was devastating. Violence took the life of another child every five minutes, and it was estimated that every year, at least 1 billion children – half of the world's children – suffered some form of violence. The impact of climate change on children must also be addressed. The international community should better respond to the needs of children in its climate-related investments. States should work together to ensure children everywhere were safe.

7. **Mr. Rizal** (Malaysia) said that it was not surprising that Palestine continued to be among the deadliest areas of conflict for children owing to the dastardly actions of Israel, the occupying Power. In that regard, it was regrettable that Israel had not been listed as a party committing grave violations, despite its continued indiscriminate killing of and violence against thousands of Palestinian children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Given that the number of cases of verified grave violations was increasing at alarming levels, his delegation wished to know what immediate steps could be taken to significantly reduce those grave violations.

8. **Ms. González** (Argentina) said that, given the increase in vulnerability of boys and girls caused by the worsening of multidimensional conflicts and ongoing conflicts around the globe, it would be interesting to learn what mechanisms should be adopted to strengthen the role of specialized child protection staff in peacekeeping missions to ensure implementation of a

prevention approach centred on victims' needs and to guarantee the full protection of the rights of children.

9. **Mr. Tammsaar** (Estonia), speaking on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden), said that the Russian Federation had been listed in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict as a party that was carrying out grave violations against children. The severity of those violations against Ukrainian children in the context of the Russian war of aggression was extremely disturbing, including the reference to the youngest victim of rape, who was only four years old. The International Criminal Court had issued arrest warrants for the President and for the Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation, who were responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia and Belarus. The Government of Ukraine had identified over 19,000 children that had been unlawfully deported or otherwise separated from their parents or guardians. Had Russia signed the joint action plan or indicated a timeline for signing it? Had Russian officials provided the Office of the Special Representative with access to the occupied territories of Ukraine?

10. **Mr. Kuyimizakis** (Malta) said that his delegation was looking forward to the outcome of the work of the Special Representative that was being undertaken in partnership with the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society on a model of reintegration for displaced children and young people into receiving societies. The humanitarian-peace-development nexus provided a starting point from which the drivers of grave violations could be analysed holistically. It was important to uphold the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the application of an age and gender differentiation lens to conflict prevention measures. In view of the challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda, he wondered what more Member States could do to support the mandate of the Special Representative.

11. **Ms. Andrić** (Croatia) said that the findings from the latest report on children and armed conflict required persistent political engagement. Although the international community had developed powerful instruments, which provided valuable tools to protect children's rights and strengthen their protection, that had not been sufficient to stop recurring grave violations. Ensuring better protection for children during armed conflict and holding perpetrators accountable should be high priorities in conflict settings. Engagement with parties to conflict seemed to be an effective first step in that regard. He enquired

about best practices that had led to a greater commitment from Governments in preventing grave violations.

12. **Ms. Mousa** (Saudi Arabia) said that her country shared the concern of the Special Representative regarding grave violations against children, including killing, maiming and recruitment. The report contained a recommendation to formulate a comprehensive strategy under the auspices of the General Assembly that would encompass all initiatives regarding conflict-affected children. She asked whether a preliminary outline of that strategy had been developed and what mechanisms would be available for its implementation.

13. **Ms. Mihail** (Romania) said that the Special Representative had expressed concern about the increasing instrumentalization of schools as part of hostilities, with attacks on schools and hospitals and their protected personnel increasing by 112 per cent in 2022 compared with the previous year. Romania had done its utmost to ensure the protection of all Ukrainian children, including unaccompanied ones, who had crossed its borders. Efforts had been made to integrate those children into the national education system, but many chose to attend online classes organized by Ukraine. She asked whether the issue of access to education for children in armed conflict had been included in the Special Representative's efforts to build partnerships with regional and subregional organizations. What measures had the United Nations envisaged to support family reunification?

14. **Mr. Ono** (Japan) said that it would be interesting to learn how implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, could be renewed. The situation laid out in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict was deplorable. It was regrettable that instruments to protect children in armed conflict and international humanitarian law were being ignored. Japan was committed to the protection of children's rights, including their rights to education and health care, and would continue to cooperate with Member States, the United Nations system and civil society in that regard.

15. **Mr. Bauwens** (Belgium) said that it was appalling to learn of the increase in attacks on schools and hospitals, not least as a result of the unprovoked war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. States should protect education from attacks in line with Security Council resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#) and endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. His delegation welcomed the special focus in the report of the Special Representative on the vulnerabilities of the millions of children that had

been displaced because of conflict. Belgium was deeply concerned about the human rights violations and abuses endured by displaced children. He urged all States to respect the rights of displaced children and to give them the special protection to which they were entitled. States that had not yet done so should ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its two optional protocols.

16. **Ms. Freudenreich** (France) said that the mandate of the Special Representative played a vital role in upholding international law and protecting children. The international community must redouble its efforts to end the atrocities that continued to be committed against children in armed conflicts. France had always been in the vanguard of those efforts, working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to uphold the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups. She asked what the Special Representative had drawn from her recent visit to Tehran and whether Ukraine had been covered under the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

17. **Ms. Asaju** (Nigeria) said that, in accordance with her country's Child Rights Act, the best interests of the child were of utmost importance. Committed to ending all forms of violence against children, Nigeria continued to work to protect children on multiple levels by leveraging the support of friends and allies in the country's conflict zones. The report of the Special Representative included claims of "grave violations" in her country that were too strong. Nigerian officials were especially sensitive to the rights of children, especially during armed conflict. Nigeria had not placed any restriction with regard to access to conflict areas by duly accredited groups.

18. **Ms. Ijaz** (Pakistan) said that her delegation was deeply concerned about the persistent violations of human rights and international humanitarian law against children in illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The "grave violations" by the Indian security forces against children in those areas had been highlighted in the 2022 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Unfortunately, the situation had not changed. In his 2023 report, the Secretary-General had rightly urged India to prohibit the use of lethal and non-lethal force on children, including ending the use of pellet guns, prevent all forms of ill-treatment of children in detention and protect children from sexual offences. She asked what mechanism the Office of the Special Representative intended to adopt in the future to monitor and report on serious violations.

19. **Ms. Stricker** (Switzerland) said that Switzerland was alarmed at the increase in the number of children

affected by grave violations, in flagrant breach of States' obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. Engagement with all stakeholders and in all contexts and the monitoring and reporting mechanism were essential elements in the implementation of the Special Representative's mandate. She asked about the main difficulties that the Office of the Special Representative had faced with regard to the monitoring and reporting mechanism both on the ground and in New York.

20. **Ms. Alexandridou** (Greece) said that it greater global awareness and strong partnerships were needed to prevent grave violations being committed against children in times of armed conflict. It would be interesting to learn how Member States could contribute to the promotion of the Special Representative's new public awareness campaign that was to be launched in 2024, aimed at putting the voices of children at the centre of her work. Greece had included the promotion of the Security Council agendas on children and armed conflict, as well as on women and peace and security, among the priorities of its candidacy as a non-permanent member of the Council for the period 2025–2026. In that context, her delegation expressed its readiness to keep the issue of children and armed conflict high on the agenda of the United Nations system.

21. **Mr. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that his delegation would like to hear more about the steps that the Special Representative, as the leading advocate of the United Nations for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, planned to take to address the despicable crimes, including several of the six grave violations, that were affecting thousands of children in Nagorno-Karabakh. On 19 and 20 September 2023, Azerbaijan had launched an assault in which schools had been attacked and children killed. As a result, 100,000 people, one third of them children, had been forcibly displaced. Prior to that, the civilian population had endured almost 10 months of blockade while Azerbaijan denied humanitarian access.

22. **Ms. Al-Buainain** (Qatar) said that her country was pleased to take part in spreading global awareness and identifying priorities related to the children and armed conflict agenda. In addition, Qatar had donated \$2.5 million to the Office of the Special Representative for the period 2018–2023. Qatar attached importance to the recommendations contained in the report, especially those relating to increased capacity-building for providing technical support and to long-term gender-sensitive reintegration programmes.

23. **Ms. Šmidt** (Slovenia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her country had been a member of the

Security Council during the adoption of Council resolution 1261 (1999), the first on children and armed conflict. Slovenia would continue to be a strong voice for the children and armed conflict mandate during its upcoming Council membership. Her delegation was looking forward to engaging in close cooperation with the Special Representative and her Office. Given that an unprecedented number of the six grave violations had been committed against children in armed conflict, she wondered how the international community could better ensure accountability.

24. **Ms. Orduz Duran** (Colombia) said that her delegation was grateful to the Special Representative for acknowledging the implementation by Colombia of the Safe Schools Declaration. Government bodies had prepared an action plan for implementation of the Declaration with a view to ensuring that the necessary measures were in place to protect schools against attacks and to prevent them from being used for military purposes. Colombia was committed to the implementation of peace agreements, recognizing their importance as a mechanism for protecting the rights of children and young people.

25. **Ms. Mudrenko** (Ukraine) said that Russian crimes against Ukrainian children were one of the most horrible markers of the Russian war of aggression. Ukraine remained resolute in its determination to bolster the protection of children, including those abducted by the Russian Federation. To that end, her country had established constructive dialogue and cooperation with the United Nations team devoted to the issue of children and armed conflict. A joint prevention plan signed by the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations was being implemented. The Russian Federation must fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, which included ending all grave violations against children in Ukraine and ensuring the timely and safe return of all Ukrainian children who were being forcefully and illegally held by Russia.

26. **Mr. Oehri** (Liechtenstein) said that his delegation was grateful to the Special Representative for mentioning the cooperation between her Office and the Liechtenstein-based non-governmental organization All Survivors Project in her report. The Special Representative had travelled extensively during the reporting period, and his delegation would be interested to know the key takeaways from her visit to the Russian Federation. During her visit to Israel and the State of Palestine, she had identified prevention and protection commitments that those parties could adopt to address a situation that continued to have one of the highest

numbers of children affected by conflict. He asked for additional information on follow-up by those Parties.

27. **Ms. Lortkipanidze** (Georgia) said that her delegation was deeply concerned by the lack of protection of children residing in conflict areas. As a result of the Russian war of aggression, for the second year, children in Ukraine had been forced to endure unprecedented violence, including forced deportations, which amounted to war crimes. Russian acts of aggression and the consequences of its occupation were well-known to Georgia. The Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions were experiencing a dire humanitarian and human rights situation, in which people regularly faced grave human rights violations. One of the most concerning developments was the ban on education in the Georgian language. In her report, the Special Representative had emphasized the need for safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access. How could joint international efforts effectively contribute to tackling the persistent denial of humanitarian access for children in conflict situations?

28. **Ms. Salem** (State of Palestine) said that it would be interesting to learn how Member States and the Secretary-General could support the universality of the Special Representative's mandate, ensuring that it was not undermined and was equally effective in all situations, without double standards, and that her mandate in occupied Palestine was not reduced to a data collection exercise. In his 2022 report on children and armed conflict, the Secretary-General had delivered a warning to Israel according to which it would be listed if its violations were repeated. It was very disappointing that the Secretary-General had not acted on his warning and that he had not listed Israel for its flagrant violations, which had continued to rise during every reporting period. The continued abuse and lack of accountability must end.

29. **Ms. Domanska** (Poland) said that attacks on children served as powerful weapons to undermine the future of nations. Deeply involved in helping Ukrainian children who had suffered from the unprovoked and unjustified Russian aggression, Poland welcomed that the report of the Special Representative identified Ukraine as one of the countries with the highest number of grave violations affecting children. In her report, the Special Representative had also rightly identified Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups as perpetrators of those grave violations, urging them to take immediate measures to cease and prevent such violations and to pursue accountability. Her delegation hoped that the Special Representative would pay close attention to the situation in Ukraine and provide adequate data in that regard. She asked what measures

the Special Representative was planning to take to prevent grave violations affecting children, particularly in Ukraine.

30. **Mr. Maes** (Luxembourg) said that the protection of children's rights, especially in armed conflicts, remained a priority for Luxembourg. In her report, the Special Representative had indicated that better protecting children would require the integration of that goal into the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and efforts to prevent conflict. In that regard, she had proposed convening a dedicated United Nations conference to collect all existing tools and initiatives related to children and armed conflict. He would like to know how the conference could be organized and what other United Nations stakeholders needed to be involved?

31. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was grateful to the Special Representative for her recent visit to Moscow. However, his delegation disagreed with the politicized decision made by the Secretary-General to list the Russian Federation in his report, a decision that was based on unverified data. His delegation was committed to the protection of children in armed conflict and took care to prevent the deaths of children and damage to hospitals and schools. As for the situation in Ukraine, the issue of protection of children had been used in a cynical way for a smear campaign against his country. Estonia and some other countries had played an active role in that campaign.

32. **Ms. Sonkar** (India) said that the efforts made by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict had led to the protection and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups and those efforts should continue. The delegation of Pakistan had once again attempted to exploit the United Nations platform to utter falsehoods against her country. Her delegation dismissed and condemned those remarks. India was firmly committed to supporting the United Nations in its endeavour to protect children in situations of armed conflict.

33. **Mr. Eldahshan** (Egypt) said that his delegation expressed concern about increasing numbers of deaths and injuries of children during armed conflicts. The international community must adopt a comprehensive approach in addressing the root causes of conflicts in order to protect civilians, especially children. In addition, more investment was needed in national organizations that were working to foster stability and strengthen adherence to international law. Increased international cooperation was also needed to address the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had

exacerbated the repercussions of armed conflict for children.

34. **Ms. Schuller** (European Union) said that her delegation was outraged at the high number of grave violations committed against children in armed conflicts around the world, in particular the increase in attacks on schools and hospitals. In that context, it strongly condemned the unjustified and unprovoked aggression of Russia against Ukraine in violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The continued degradation of children's rights caused by the war of aggression was a cause of deep concern. In particular, the ongoing deportation of children to Russia and to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine was deplorable. As pointed out by the Secretary-General in his annual report, the high number of killings and maiming of children attributed to the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups was shocking. She asked how accountability for those violations could be strengthened.

35. **Ms. Zoghbi** (Lebanon) said that, according to the latest report of Save the Children, at least 38 Palestinian children had been killed in the occupied West Bank so far in 2023, making it the deadliest year since records began. She asked how the Office of the Special Representative intended to respond to such an alarming rate of killings.

36. **Mr. La Haozhao** (China) said that, thanks to the joint efforts of the international community, steady progress had been made since the establishment in 1996 of the United Nations mandate on children and armed conflict. However, it was regrettable that children's rights to life, health and education continued to be violated by armed conflict and unilateral sanctions. Tens of thousands of children in armed conflicts were suffering injury, hunger and disease and were denied access to education as a result of unilateral sanctions. Such measures seriously undermined the rights of children. States should heed the call of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and immediately lift all forms of unilateral coercive measures. China was committed to continuing its active engagement and international cooperation to ensure that children around the world enjoyed security and human rights.

37. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that it was concerning that armed groups in several parts of the world continued, with complete impunity, to recruit children to armed groups, in flagrant violation of all international humanitarian and human rights instruments. She asked how the mandate of the Special Representative could be strengthened and what

obstacles remained to its fulfilment. Furthermore, she asked the Special Representative to share the goals and expected outcomes of the international conference that she intended to organize.

38. **Mr. Lamce** (Albania) said that the dire situation of children in many parts of the world was clearly shown by the annual report. His delegation was deeply concerned about the situation of children in Ukraine following the invasion by Russia. Urgent action, with a focus on prevention, was needed to improve the reality of children on the ground. All opportunities to cooperate at the subregional, regional and global levels must be seized in order to mitigate the impact of conflict on children. He would be grateful for further information on the steps taken by the Office of the Special Representative to improve partnerships, especially with regional organizations and civil society organizations.

39. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the report of the Special Representative showed that the incidence of denial of humanitarian access in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Afghanistan remained very high. Iran, as a neighbouring country and host of millions of Afghan people, had provided basic services like education and health care to Afghan children. To mitigate grave violations against children, it was imperative to address the root causes of conflicts. She asked for more information on unilateral coercive measures and economic blockades, which could exacerbate the plight of children in conflict-affected areas.

40. **Ms. Velichko** (Belarus) said that children who had been traumatized by war were unlikely to be able to live normally in peacetime. It was sad that the protection of children in armed conflicts had little to do with protecting children and their interests, but was instead part of a political struggle. The protection of children in the Donbass was a highly politicized issue, on which Belarus was working to establish a dialogue. She asked what States could do to ensure that children were not held hostage to political intrigue.

41. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the report of the Special Representative contained 81 paragraphs, more than half of which described the activities that she had undertaken. However, very few of those paragraphs were about the situation in Syria and they only reproduced what had been included in her previous report regarding Syrian children. During the seventy-seventh session, his delegation had informed the Special Representative that more than 500 children were trapped in northeast Syria, which was under the control of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces.

He asked what the Special Representative had done for those children.

42. **Mr. Reza Bautista** (Mexico) said that his delegation recognized the efforts made by the Special Representative and the United Nations system to build strategic alliances and contribute to alleviating the issue of grave violations against children. The importance of data analysis and data management for the prevention of grave violations against children was emphasized in the report. However, despite the increased attention devoted to the issue, it was difficult to attain clear data owing to the fear of reprisals and stigma, which obscured the true magnitude. He wished to know what actions could serve to reverse that trend and to protect survivors and ensure that they were free from reprisals.

43. **Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) asked the Special Representative whether a specific mandate was needed to help her to list or condemn the crimes committed by the occupying Power against children in Palestine. Furthermore, reports did not actually help children; what helped children were rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and bringing an end to conflicts.

44. **Ms. Ahangari** (Azerbaijan) said that although it was recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child that children should be brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity and tolerance, Armenia had recruited children into its armed forces and armed groups over the previous decade. The exploitation of children for hate, propaganda and promotion of intolerance against Azerbaijan was of particular concern and undermined the peace and security efforts at the regional level. Her delegation had submitted to the United Nations a detailed report on the issue (A/77/714). She asked what measures could be taken in accordance with her mandate to prevent the abuse of children for military purposes.

45. **Mr. Muñoz** (Sovereign Order of Malta) said that Pope Francis had said that families were the first place in which children learned the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing concern and care for others. In that context, the tyrants who perpetuated violent conflicts in the world had once been young boys and girls. It was worth considering that parental absence, particularly that of a father figure, may have contributed to their poorly formed consciences. Aware of the repercussions of fatherlessness, his country operated hundreds of programmes to support displaced children facing unimaginable challenges. Those initiatives were focused on fostering communal environments that helped children to build healthy

relationships, including by offering counselling to children and young adults in refugee camps.

46. **Ms. Gamba** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that Member States could support the work of her Office by ensuring that robust language on children and armed conflict was included in the forthcoming resolution on the rights of the child. With respect to the United Nations conference that she was calling for, her Office was asking for the opportunity to carry out a feasibility study, to be presented to the Committee, on the merits and costs of such a conference. In her view, the conference would be integral to prevention efforts and would foster partnerships with regional organizations.

47. Member States could also support her work by condemning abuses and violations against children and by urging all parties to conflicts to end impunity and strengthen accountability. The best way to ensure accountability was by changing national laws to criminalize grave violations. States should also adopt protocols regarding the handover of children found in the field. Furthermore, States should ratify the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, if they had not yet done so, and should consider endorsing the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

48. The campaign she intended to launch would highlight the rights of children and would generate public awareness of the Optional Protocol. The campaign would incorporate inclusive processes and input from all stakeholders, including children themselves. Member States and civil society organizations were encouraged to join working groups that would provide input into the development of the campaign.

49. Member States should consider participating in the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict. States could also support the creation of new Groups of Friends with a view to advocating for the implementation of all of the country conclusions adopted by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. States could also work through regional and subregional organizations to champion prevention activities.

50. More resources were needed for efforts to protect children in peacekeeping operations. In addition, child-specific language should be included in any resolution that created or extended a peacekeeping mission. More efforts were needed to strengthen capacity-building and training on the prevention of violations for missions and country task forces on the ground. States should engage

bilaterally to ensure that child protection actors had access to children and to ensure the delivery of assistance and services.

51. She continued to engage with the Russian Federation regarding the prevention of grave violations. Her Office had called on the Russian Federation to grant access to specialized agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR so that they could carry out reintegration activities. In all of her engagements with States, she advocated for children to be reunited with their families.

52. **Ms. Maalla M'jid** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children), introducing her report on child protection in the context of travel and tourism ([A/78/214](#)), said that multiple and overlapping crises, including armed conflict, political instability, economic hardship, climate change, food insecurity and forced displacement, continued to exacerbate children's vulnerability globally. Nevertheless, although the goal to end violence against children by 2030 remained elusive, faster and better action could lead to change. Rethinking travel and tourism while recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic required a renewed and relevant agenda for action that promoted sustainability in its broadest sense, including by respecting local cultures, empowering communities and ensuring children's safety.

53. Infrastructure designed to accommodate the 2022 spike in international tourism and in domestic and business travel was being misappropriated by offenders who subjected children to sexual exploitation, both online and offline, labour exploitation and trafficking. Increased digitalization, evolving modes of travel and tourism and large influxes of visitors for major events led to elevated risks through easier access to and closer contact with children and to greater opportunities and tolerance for violence against children in and around transport, accommodation and work hubs. Strong international and national legal standards, guidance and codes of conduct for the travel and tourism sector, as well as dynamic multi-stakeholder partnerships, all provided a solid foundation for action. Increasing the speed and scale of change required State legislation and policies on business accountability and due diligence on child rights, including among information and communications technology (ICT) companies, as well as cross-sectoral and cross-border approaches to strengthening coordination and information-sharing.

54. During numerous dialogues, children worldwide had stressed the importance of being informed of risks and being empowered to face them through strengthened networks and peer support, highlighting the need to build trust in and secure action and accountability by



States, institutions and the industry as a whole for effective prevention, protection and referral. The travel and tourism sector could act as an accelerator for sustainable development, with people and planet at its core, by providing opportunities for just and inclusive growth and decent work that tackled the root causes of violence and exploitation. It could help to build and strengthen the services needed by children and families to prevent and respond to violence, both online and offline. In order to achieve that, it was necessary to ensure that the sector was truly sustainable, with child protection at its centre. Children were both the future and the present; investing in their protection and well-being could not wait.

55. **Ms. Matos Menéndez** (Dominican Republic) said that her country echoed the call by the Special Representative to promote solid and sustainable investments by the international community in comprehensive protections for children and gender-related issues, to combat the persistent and increasing global violence against children. During a recent visit to the Dominican Republic, the Special Representative had met with high-level Government officials and other stakeholders and observed first-hand various projects aimed at fulfilling the country's commitment to ending that scourge, including the establishment of the Cabinet for Children and Adolescents. She enquired about the effectiveness of programmes and policies that the Special Representative had observed.

56. **Mr. Kuymizakis** (Malta) said that child protection measures must be incorporated into efforts to prevent and end conflicts, including in the Security Council. Investing in integrated national child protective systems was essential to building resilient societies and to getting back on track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. His delegation therefore welcomed the focus of the Special Representative in her report on protecting children in the travel and tourism sectors. He asked how to ensure that a multi-stakeholder, multisectoral and child rights-centred approach was taken to tackling violence against children in that context.

57. **Ms. Fango** (Philippines) said that her country was committed to complying with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had recently presented its periodic report on implementation of the Convention to the relevant Committee. Her Government had passed laws on the recognition and protection of foundlings and penalties for online sexual exploitation and abuse of children and related materials. It had established protection units for women and children, as well as nationwide child help lines, and had created a national action plan on children with

disabilities as a multisectoral framework to ensure their protection against violence. A magna carta for children was to be completed by 2025, and a child ombudsperson was to be established. Her delegation requested information on best practices with regard to such a mechanism for children, based on the Special Representative's experiences.

58. **Mr. Bauwens** (Belgium) said that, given its deep concerns about the continued existence of numerous forms of exploitation of and violence against children in the context of travel and tourism, his country's embassy network had implemented campaigns to increase awareness among travellers and encourage extreme vigilance for cases of sexual exploitation of children. It was unfortunate that some 50 reports on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography were overdue. His delegation called upon States to submit their reports without further delay.

59. **Ms. Almeida Marinho** (Portugal) said that, in the lead-up to the midterm stocktaking point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Special Representative's mandate was more pressing than ever. After the near standstill caused by the pandemic, the travel and tourism sector was now recovering, leading not only to growing opportunities, but also to increased risks and challenges. By December 2022, millions of children had been displaced as a consequence of conflict and violence, leaving them exposed to multiple forms of violence and harm. She asked the Special Representative to share some concrete results produced to date for Member States through the Virtual Global Taskforce, which was working to ensure that the rights of children were upheld in the context of travel and tourism. She also wondered what kind of support tools were provided in the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

60. **Mr. Reza Bautista** (Mexico) said that tourism was one of the pillars of the Mexican economy and a potential social reconciliation booster. Having played host to the sixth-highest number of international tourists worldwide in 2022, his country agreed that it was necessary to foster an environment that protected both girls and boys from the risks associated with the revitalization of the sector. It was essential to strengthen the operational framework for tourism-related activities and value chains. Given that children were especially vulnerable to harm stemming from the increase in trafficking and tourism, he enquired as to the most appropriate gender-sensitive practices and actions to apply for preventing violence.

61. **Ms. Orduz Duran** (Colombia) said that the Inter-Institutional Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Violence and Comprehensive Care for Child and Adolescent Victims of Sexual Abuse of Colombia was a consultative mechanism that worked with civil society to coordinate actions to ensure comprehensive protection and the restoration of human rights in cases of violations. Her country's commitment to the matter was reflected in its decision to co-host the first global ministerial conference on ending violence against children, jointly with the World Health Organization, the Office of the Special Representative and Sweden, to be held in Bogota in November 2024.

62. **Ms. Pereira Gomes** (Brazil) said that her country had established several tools to assist with the protection of children in the context of travel and tourism. They included its Criminal Code, under which even attempted sexual exploitation of children was considered a crime; a voluntary code of conduct for travel and tourism companies whereby adherents were expected to combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children; and a reporting system that facilitated the receipt and investigation of information on cases of child labour in the country.

63. **Mr. Dolah** (Malaysia) said that his country relied on travel and tourism and recognized both the leading role played by the sector in fostering economic growth and social development and the need for a solid foundation to protect children from all forms of violence. In 2017, Malaysia had enacted a law on sexual offences against children, to comprehensively address physical, non-physical and online sexual crimes against children, and had subsequently established a special court to handle such crimes. He enquired about best practices in addressing violence against children in the context of tourism and travel.

64. **Ms. Alexandridou** (Greece) said that her country's close cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative had been evidenced during the latter's visit to the country in 2022, which had included meetings with public and civil society stakeholders and consideration of policies aimed at protecting unaccompanied minors. Greece had incorporated the rights of children in all the Sustainable Development Goals under consideration at the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development, at which the country had presented its second voluntary national report. All Member States were encouraged to do the same. She requested the Special Representative's opinion as to when the Goals could be achieved.

65. **Ms. Mudrenko** (Ukraine) said that Russian aggression in Ukraine had caused the largest children's

rights crisis in Europe since the Second World War. All of the country's 7.5 million children had been affected, with nearly two thirds internally or externally displaced, creating additional threats and risk of violence to them. That was especially true of those who had been abducted by the Russian Federation, which continued to reject constructive dialogue with relevant United Nations bodies and international organizations and refused to provide a comprehensive list of the names and whereabouts of all forcibly transferred or deported Ukrainian children, including those subsequently adopted or transferred to foster families. She invited the particular attention, efforts and expertise of the Special Representative on the matter.

66. **Mr. La Haozhao** (China) said that, in the context of the current sluggish global recovery and turbulent international security situation, children were at greater risk of violence than ever before, requiring increased global efforts to mitigate those risks and protect children's rights. As part of its serious efforts to safeguard children's rights, his Government had released a national programme for child development for the period 2021–2030, aimed at preventing and suppressing violence against children and emphasizing zero tolerance for such violence. Underscoring the responsibilities of the State, society, schools, families and other parties, the Government had created an inter-agency cooperation mechanism for preventing and curbing violence and strengthening the monitoring and reporting system. China called for strengthened international cooperation in shouldering the responsibility for preventing and eliminating violence against children, who were the future of humanity.

67. **Mr. Kouakou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that visits by the Special Representative to Member States had helped to change perceptions on child protection. Her visit to Côte d'Ivoire had served to accelerate the mobilization of child protection process stakeholders and the validation of the country's new national child protection policy. Nevertheless, current socioeconomic challenges were hindering the implementation of the national strategy for the protection of marginalized children and adolescents.

68. **Ms. Schuller** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that her delegation welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on ensuring the protection of children in the context of travel and tourism. The international community must address the misuse of the travel and tourism sector for trafficking in persons and modern forms of slavery, sexual and economic exploitation. The European Union welcomed the commitment by the Special Rapporteur to making sustainable contributions

to post-pandemic recovery in the sector in ways that encompassed a wide array of child protection measures. She enquired about specific developed and developing countries that had taken positive steps towards protecting children from violence in the context of tourism and travel, some of the challenges they faced and real-life examples of best practices that could serve as a guide for others.

69. **Ms. Lula** (Poland) said that her delegation agreed with the Special Representative's statement in her report that joint efforts were crucial to fulfilling international commitments on human rights, in particular given the multiple crises that increased children's vulnerability to violence. Poland deeply appreciated the Special Representative's assessment of the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine on children, thousands of whom had had to flee their country. As a neighbouring country harbouring the largest number of Ukrainian refugees, Poland was prepared to engage further in those efforts. She wondered what role technology and the digital environment could play in either exacerbating or mitigating violence against children, both online and offline, and how Member States could strike a balance between digital access and child protection in that complex context.

70. **Mr. Di Capua** (Italy), speaking as a youth delegate, said that, in her report, the Special Representative had highlighted numerous worrying challenges to the protection of children from online and offline threats, as well as the risks to brain development, physical and mental health and learning ability caused by increasing exposure to online victimization and overall violent scenes. As the number of young Internet users continued to rise across all regions, the risk of online victimization and cybercrime towards children deserved particular consideration. He enquired about emerging best practices that advanced the full realization of children's rights with regard to formulating legal protections that recognized the importance of protecting children from online threats.

71. **Ms. Qureshi** (Pakistan) said that violence against children was the worst of the human rights violations. Its various forms included domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, torture, trafficking and child labour and even extended to online spaces. In conflict situations, including situations of foreign occupation, violence against children had reached unprecedented levels. Since the illegal and unilateral actions by India in August 2019, Kashmiri children had faced unimaginable horrors at the hands of the Indian occupation forces, including sexual abuse, torture, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, killings and blinding by pellet guns. Member States were urged not to turn a blind eye

to the heinous acts of violence against children in conflict situations and demonstrate their commitment to preventing violence against children by ending the culture of impunity.

72. **Mr. Wald** (Luxembourg) said that the detention of minors in penitentiary institutions, regardless of the reasons or circumstances, never justified negligence, violence or abuse. They were vulnerable and must receive the protection and support they needed. He asked what measures could be taken to create a juvenile detention system that would not simply punish minors but actively contribute to their social reintegration.

73. **Ms. Mousa** (Saudi Arabia) said that efforts to ensure the sustainability of the travel and tourism sector were integral to efforts to end violence against children. She asked the Special Representative how a balance could be struck between sustainable economic development in the travel and tourism industry on the one hand and, on the other, integrated protection that considered the needs of children, and what the role of the United Nations should be in that regard.

74. **Mr. Ono** (Japan) said that, as a Board member and pathfinding country of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, his country was firmly committed to ending violence against children and creating a safer environment for them. Japan welcomed the takeover by the Office of the Special Representative of the Partnership's pathfinding initiatives, including the mission to accelerate the adoption of national action plans to end violence against children and the sharing of good practices. Japan hoped that the Office would continue to carry out that work successfully and was ready to share best practices. He asked the Special Representative to share her vision on promoting those plans.

75. **Ms. Mimran Rosenberg** (Israel) said that the effects of contemporary crises, compounded by high mobility and digitization across geographical boundaries, had made travel and tourism a fertile ground for vulnerability. Her country was strongly committed to the protection of children and had contributed to the report of the Special Representative. Israel had established a robust legal framework and procedures to combat child exploitation, with strict regulations, including the screening and vetting of volunteers who worked with vulnerable populations. She enquired about best practices for Member States and other stakeholders with regard to raising awareness and preparedness among children in the face of those threats.

76. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation agreed with many of the assessments set out by the Special Representative in her report,

including with regard to the importance of investing in development, eliminating poverty and developing the digital realm. He categorically rejected accusations that his country had illegitimately removed Ukrainian children and brought them to the Russian Federation. Rather, his country had voluntarily evacuated and saved children whose families had been the victims of shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces, which were using Western weapons to strike civilian sites. He requested that the Special Representative focus on the plight of Ukrainian children in Poland and other European countries.

77. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that her country had made considerable progress in implementing its comprehensive policy on child protection, which had kept numerous children in conflict with the law out of detention. According to the representative of UNICEF in Morocco, the country's juvenile justice system reflected some of the best practices worldwide. She asked what other good practices could facilitate the inclusion of children in dialogue with public and decision-making institutions and how to promote their effective, active and meaningful participation in decisions that concerned them.

78. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation fully agreed with the key message in the report of the Special Representative on both the urgency and achievability of preventing and ending the deprivation of liberty of children. His delegation also considered the conduct of consultations with more than 1,200 children as being a useful and important practice and the diversity of her meetings impressive. He also referred to her launch of an advocacy brief and call for action supported by the Spanish actress Penelope Cruz.

79. **Ms. Maalla M'jid** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children) said that early detection of all vulnerabilities was necessary to truly protect all children from all forms of violence and exploitation in all settings, including in travel and tourism. With one in six children living in extreme poverty, one in six living in conflict areas, millions displaced and barely a quarter of children benefiting from social protections worldwide, it was essential to address all drivers of the issue, as highlighted in the 2030 Agenda.

80. In order to build back better with regard to travel and tourism, it was necessary to rethink the sector, not only by making it safer and more sustainable, but also with a view to people-centred development, which began in early childhood. The topic would be addressed at the upcoming meeting of the Executive Council of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Several conferences

held in recent years under the aegis of a high-level task force on child protection in travel and tourism had highlighted the need to involve not only tourism ministry stakeholders, but also participants from justice ministries, law enforcement agencies and the education and social protection sectors as well as the private sector, including the ICT sector. The Virtual Global Taskforce fostered such a multi-stakeholder approach, which was important for ensuring proper tracking of exploiters and traffickers of children, not only across borders, but also locally and nationally, as well as with regard to the large volumes of incoming migrant workers and businesspeople. Many countries were raising awareness among children, consumers, tourists and travellers, but ensuring strong child protection services and reporting mechanisms was also essential.

81. It was also necessary to implement controls over the growing informal sector. Good practices included careful screening of volunteers; working very closely with labour ministries to ensure the involvement of labour inspectors; and ensuring timely access to justice to end impunity. As with the ICT sector, voluntary codes of conduct were a positive step, but were not binding. The upcoming review of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime and adoption of the global digital compact provided opportunities to ensure that the balance between the right to privacy and right to protection did not benefit criminals and that child protection issues were truly being taken into account.

82. A child ombudsman was an important tool, in line with both the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, not only for providing counselling, but also for monitoring the implementation of their rights through an independent, accessible and child- and gender-sensitive complaints mechanism.

83. With regard to alternatives to detention, a recent meeting had been held with UNICEF and a panel of NGOs on the deprivation of liberty, mainly in connection with camps in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic and the use of counter-terrorism to deny children's rights. Extreme caution was required and conditions must be applied in order to prevent cases of extrajudicial deprivation of liberty and detention of children under the guise of rehabilitation. It was therefore important to ensure access to those settings and to provide alternatives, as already seen in many countries. Both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography must be implemented. Child protection was also addressed in the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics of the World

Trade Organization, which still had very few State signatories, despite having been adopted in 2019. Because children were increasingly on the move as a result of conflict, climate crisis, poverty and food insecurity, it was important to translate discussion into concrete services that were accessible to all and that all available voices be harnessed to make messages heard, whether that be Penelope Cruz or Nadine Labaki.

84. **Mr. Fontaine** (Special Adviser on Child Rights, Office of the Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund), introducing two reports, said that children constituted a distinct group of human rights holders under international law and that the full scope of children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights deserved equal attention.

85. The Secretary-General, in his report on the status of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (A/78/366), recalled how children's lives and rights were increasingly connected to the digital environment, at younger ages than ever before. Despite the vast potential of that environment for realizing children's rights, the ongoing digital divide meant that too many children had limited or no access to those benefits. Furthermore, insufficient legislation, services and education to ensure their safe and empowering use had, in many cases, increased the risk of children's exposure to harmful content and provided new ways to perpetrate violence against them and lure them into unlawful activities. The increasing use of emerging digital tools and technologies raised critical issues related to privacy, consent and accountability. Concerted action by States was needed, not only to overcome digital exclusion, but also to ensure alignment with international human rights standards and child rights principles in the digital environment.

86. In his report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls and the recovery from it (A/78/284), the Secretary-General presented a stark picture for girls around the world, especially adolescent girls and those living in vulnerable circumstances. The pandemic had led to extensive disruptions to education, intensifying barriers to girls' education; increased worldwide food insecurity had disproportionately increased malnutrition among women and girls; many girls' mental health and well-being had deteriorated and many more had been pushed into child labour; and both child marriage and female genital mutilation were expected to increase. Although some recovery efforts had been focused explicitly on girls, further investment was required in legislative, policy and programme interventions dedicated specifically to promoting and protecting their rights, including through increased multisectoral coordination, guaranteeing quality health care and

mental health services and strengthening child protection systems, including in humanitarian settings. Both online and offline, children were calling for the realization of their rights; a child rights approach must be the cornerstone of collective efforts.

87. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that the work of UNICEF to support programme countries in implementing pandemic recovery efforts had been especially appreciated. In Bangladesh, the country programme had been aligned with the national response and recovery plan, providing support for the continuation of its regular immunization programme, which had been disrupted during the pandemic, and for combating child marriage and the exploitation of and violence against children. With pandemic-related learning losses causing more children to lag behind in reading comprehension, she asked how UNICEF was helping struggling countries to bring children back to school and to ensure their access to learning resources, including digital technology. She also wondered how UNICEF could help climate-vulnerable countries to promote and protect the rights and welfare of children who were at extremely high risk of experiencing crisis-related impacts, especially those who had been displaced or rendered homeless as a result of climate change and related disasters.

88. **Ms. Mudrenko** (Ukraine) said that efforts by UNICEF to address the humanitarian consequences of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation had saved lives and protected millions of Ukrainian children profoundly affected by the war. A large proportion had been displaced and were suffering from stress and trauma, and only one third of children enrolled in primary and secondary schools were attending in person. Her delegation requested that UNICEF continue its efforts to alleviate the suffering of Ukrainian children, including by facilitating the identification, tracing and unification of those who were forcefully and illegally held by the Russian Federation.

89. **Mr. Benson** (Poland) said that, as evidenced by its ongoing work on the Executive Board Bureau of UNICEF and the recent fivefold increase in its voluntary contribution to the Fund's budget to support development assistance and humanitarian aid, his country placed a high priority on the promotion and protection of children's rights. Poland prioritized child vaccination efforts, both nationally and with regard to development cooperation. The alarming decline in childhood vaccination coverage due to pandemic-related disruptions threatened to undermine decades of progress in disease prevention and eradication, risking both lives and social growth and development. He enquired as to how UNICEF could create partnerships

with Governments to strengthen childhood vaccination programmes and ensure that they remained a public health priority, so as to deliver results for every child.

90. **Mr. La Haozhao** (China) said that UNICEF had made important and visible contributions to the survival, development and protection of children globally, but the current lacklustre recovery of the global economy had brought new challenges to the protection of the rights of children and other vulnerable groups. It was hoped that, during the implementation of its strategic plan for 2022–2025, UNICEF would continue to let programme countries take the lead and actively respond to their needs. China had been actively working with UNICEF to advance the child-focused Sustainable Development Goals and would continue to step up that collaboration, including with regard to health and poverty reduction, under the framework of South-South cooperation, to bolster capacity-building and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda among developing countries.

91. **Ms. Alexandridou** (Greece) said that, after seven terms on the UNICEF Executive Board, her country fully appreciated the indispensable work done by UNICEF worldwide. Protecting children's rights was a priority for Greece, both through the drafting of its second national action plan for children and, at the international level, through providing safety and stability, as well as access to education and health services, for large numbers of unaccompanied minors and refugee children. She asked what Member States could do to support the Fund's efforts to close the digital gender gap for girls.

92. **Ms. Schuller** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that UNICEF saved the lives of children and adolescents, defended their rights and helped them to fulfil their potential. Despite resources and expertise provided by the European Union and others to address the challenges faced by children globally and advance gender equality, girls still faced disproportionate barriers to education and protection, while child, early and forced marriage, harmful practices, menstruation stigma and gender-based violence continued to threaten their well-being. Those challenges underscored the importance of continued collaboration with UNICEF to remove structural barriers to their full development. Armed conflicts, the digital divide and climate change also posed threats to children's safety, education and development. Accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda required appropriate stock-taking through a child rights lens. She wondered how Member States could support UNICEF to ensure delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals, both for and with all children.

93. **Mr. Ruslan** (Malaysia) said that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought about devastating impacts, not only on physical health and mortality, but also on every aspect of people's well-being, especially among girls. Given the importance of social and reproductive health to the development of healthy individuals, his Government had reviewed its national reproductive and social health education policy following the pandemic and introduced a dedicated education programme for children, with a view to combating both sexual crimes and underage marriage. In 2022, it had launched a consultative and whole-of-society approach to further strengthening efforts in that regard. He asked about best practices to enhance global solidarity and support in tackling child marriage, especially in the post-pandemic era.

94. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that the humanitarian and developmental activities carried out by UNICEF remained critical to the welfare and protection of millions of children worldwide. Young girls faced specific vulnerabilities, including child and forced marriage, sexual violence and early pregnancy, that had been exacerbated during the pandemic and continued to threaten their empowerment. As part of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, UNICEF should play a key role in accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals; strengthen its efforts to overcome persisting challenges to enable better delivery on the ground, including through proactive measures; and maintain its focus on innovation throughout its programmes, in particular for young girls.

95. **Ms. Samai** (Algeria) asked the Special Adviser for his view on the best way to strike a balance between, on the one hand, facilitating access to modern technology to improve educational standards and, on the other, raising awareness of the dangers of those technologies, especially their potential for child exploitation and other harms.

96. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that an unprecedented set of global shifts and challenges facing children today had once been unimaginable, leaving families more worried than ever before. Although technology had enhanced many aspects of people's lives, including education, easy access to certain platforms had rendered children increasingly vulnerable to human rights violations. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Islamic Republic of Iran was committed to addressing the root causes of, and risk factors contributing to, the exploitation and sexual abuse of children. In 2021, it had adopted a document

on protecting children and adolescents in cyberspace. Addressing any human rights aspects of cyberspace required a Member State-driven process.

97. **Mr. Fontaine** (Special Adviser on Child Rights, Office of the Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund) said that the focus of the Fund's advocacy at the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change would be on formal recognition of children as agents of change across a wide range of topics and on the importance of ensuring their safe and meaningful participation, in particular by adolescent girls and those left behind. UNICEF could help with efforts to include children in the design and implementation of climate policy and action, in particular with regard to preparedness and engagement. Disruptions to childhood vaccination and other routine services as a consequence of pandemic-related setbacks were also a concern, but UNICEF was committed to continuing its support for countries in that regard, including with the introduction of the new malaria vaccine.

98. The reports contained helpful recommendations on closing the digital gap for girls and on ending child marriage, including through schools. It was important to ensure girls' involvement by providing them with space and opportunity to share their views and be heard, for which UNICEF could provide assistance. With regard to ensuring safe and protected access to the digital environment, it was essential to balance rights with the best interests of the child and to understand both the risks and the opportunities, which also required listening to children. To accelerate Sustainable Development Goal achievement, it was necessary to strengthen public financing for children in specific budgets; address data gaps to identify those who were being overlooked and left behind; and ensure their meaningful participation in the conversation.

99. **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

100. **Ms. Clifford** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine, and, in addition, Andorra, Georgia, Monaco and San Marino, said that all States that had not yet done so should ratify and implement the Convention and its optional protocols. Later in the session, the European Union would present to the Committee a resolution regarding the need to empower children in the digital environment while minimizing risks. International human rights law, including the Convention, applied to the digital

environment and obliged private actors and businesses to ensure the safety and privacy of children using online services and products. Global discussions should be had on the risks to children in the digital environment, such as sexual abuse and exploitation, gender-based violence, trafficking in persons, grooming, cyberbullying, the promotion of self-harm and risks resulting from the exploitation of children as consumers. The international community should also address unequal access by children to the opportunities offered by the digital environment.

101. The European Union remained concerned about the lack of progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Through the Global Gateway initiative and its dedicated regional investment packages, the European Union supported inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. In order to ensure safe, quality education for children in vulnerable situations and emergencies, the European Union allocated 10 per cent of its humanitarian aid budget to a programme on education in emergencies, providing funding to over 355 million children in 66 countries. The European Union was also taking action to promote decent work, eliminate child labour and invest in food security initiatives.

102. The European Union remained deeply concerned about grave violations against children in armed conflicts. The continued denial of humanitarian assistance, the killing and maiming of children, recruitment of children by armed groups, sexual and gender-based violence and attacks on schools and hospitals were of particular concern. All States were encouraged to endorse global initiatives such as the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration.

103. **Mr. Prabowo** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the world was drifting from its commitment to end all forms of violence by 2030, while poverty and multiple overlapping crises continued to expose children to the risk of violence. Children worldwide were forced into labour or marriage or were victims of trafficking in persons, child sexual exploitation or recruitment into armed or extremist groups. It was therefore crucial to mainstream children's rights throughout the work of the United Nations.

104. As an organization covering a region that was home to over 200 million children, ASEAN fully understood the critical importance of protecting children. Children were mentioned as a particular focus of concern in the fourth ASEAN Concord, which had

recently been adopted by regional leaders. ASEAN reaffirmed its commitments to promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of children in the region and to transforming early childhood education so that children could reach their full potential.

105. No effort must be spared in eliminating violence against children. To that end, the countries of the region had been implementing the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children 2016–2025, which focused on prevention, protection, support services, capacity-building, data collection and enhancing the justice system.

106. ASEAN States continued to engage in capacity-building, dialogue and information exchange in the area of the protection and promotion of the rights of children. ASEAN had recently conducted a regional dialogue in Jakarta on the protection of children online, wherein officials, experts and activists shared knowledge on the subject and highlighted practical ways to implement the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse. ASEAN also attached great importance to engaging with young people and integrating youth perspectives into its programmes and decision-making processes.

107. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador) speaking on behalf of the States members of the Central American Integration System (SICA), said that each of the States had adopted national legislation, policies and programmes to implement their international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Regional Comprehensive Social Policy 2020–2040 was focused on investment in people with an intergenerational and life-cycle approach, including investment in prenatal care, early childhood and care for children, adolescents, young people and adults. The main strategies for strengthening and expanding social security and protection systems included regional programmes to prevent violence against children, and child and adolescent pregnancy and programmes to eradicate child labour, dangerous adolescent labour, trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation.

108. The right to education should be based on equality of opportunity and non-discrimination, with free and mandatory primary education for all children, so that they had equal access to an inclusive and quality education. Secondary education should be made available to all through the gradual introduction of free education. Special measures were needed to ensure equal access and opportunities by eliminating social, economic and gender inequalities in education, especially for girls, pregnant adolescents, children with

disabilities, and those in vulnerable or marginalized situations.

109. Various initiatives had been taken to address the regional social problems of food insecurity, chronic undernutrition and malnutrition, which affected many children. The Regional Comprehensive Social Policy was designed to put an end to hunger, undernutrition and malnutrition, with a focus on children under the age of 5 years, as those factors generated and reproduced multidimensional poverty, exclusion and social marginalization, and had been exacerbated by the health and humanitarian crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

110. All States should respect, protect and promote the right of children to express themselves freely and their right to be heard, by ensuring that their opinions were taken into account, in accordance with their age and maturity, on all issues that affected them, and encourage the participation of children, including children with disabilities, in decision-making processes.

111. The empowerment of girls and investment in them were fundamental for economic growth, for achieving the Sustainable development Goals, including the eradication of poverty, in particular extreme poverty, and the effective participation of girls as agents of change in the decisions that affected them. They were key factors for breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and for protecting the full and effective enjoyment of their human rights.

112. The States members of SICA recognized that the family had primordial responsibility for the protection of children and for their growth in an environment of happiness, love and understanding that supported their full and harmonious development

113. **Mr. Cruz** (Angola), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that all SADC members had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. SADC commended ongoing efforts to eliminate child labour and supported the Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour, adopted in May 2022 at the fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, which had been held in Africa for the first time. The Call to Action emphasized the need to address setbacks to the fight against child labour owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of ongoing efforts to enhance awareness of children's rights, SADC member States commemorated the Day of the African Child every year on 16 June.

114. SADC member States recognized the need for action to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, with



a special focus on children. Most members had made significant progress in deterring trafficking of children by imposing custodial sentences of up to life imprisonment. SADC members remained committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, specifically, the realization of target 8.7 on the eradication of all forms of child labour by 2025.

115. Education was a fundamental human right and an effective tool in promoting sustainable development and eliminating poverty. SADC States continued to invest heavily in education, in particular in skill development programmes, to broaden the economic opportunities for young people. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, food price increases and global conflicts had reversed hard-won gains and exacerbated existing inequalities, which had serious consequences for children's education. SADC countries were also grappling with the issue of child, early and forced marriage. Research showed that over 125 million African women were married before the age of 18, with devastating consequences for their educational, economic and social prospects. In 2016, SADC had adopted a model law on eradicating child marriage and protecting children already in marriage.

116. SADC members had adopted multi-sectoral responses to eliminate all forms of violence, including gender-based violence, and had established community shelters for victims and survivors. The Community also continued to promote access to health care to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, which had particularly devastating effects on adolescents and young people.

117. A multisectoral approach was critical to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. Strong partnerships were therefore needed among Governments, development partners, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, churches and non-governmental organizations.

118. **Mr. Oehri** (Liechtenstein) said that schools, a protected space, were a lifeline for children in situations of armed conflict. Regrettably, in 2022, more than 3,000 attacks on schools and universities had been recorded globally, an increase of almost 20 per cent over the previous year. In the central Sahel region, school closures had increased nearly six-fold between 2019 and 2023 as a result of violent conflict and, in Ukraine, UNICEF had reported that over 1,300 schools had been completely destroyed. Liechtenstein hoped that all Member States would endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

119. In response to particularly heinous crimes against children in Ukraine, the International Criminal Court had issued a warrant for the arrest of the President and

the Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation for the war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer of children.

120. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution would disproportionately affect the life trajectories of children. In recent years, young people had brought climate change-related cases before domestic and international courts. Their demands must be addressed through ambitious emission reduction targets and other actions. The recently published general comment No. 26 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child recalled that States must ensure a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in order to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights and underlined the importance of remedies for children who continued to encounter barriers to attaining legal standing in States.

121. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure allowed children or their representatives to submit a complaint regarding a violation of their rights to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. That procedure allowed children to seek justice in cases where domestic legal systems failed to provide a remedy. Member States that had not yet ratified the Optional Protocol were encouraged to do so.

122. **Mr. Treedara** (Thailand) said that his country placed importance on prenatal care and early childhood support in order to lay a solid foundation for children's well-being. The Government had also increased the upper age limit for the 600 Thai baht monthly child support grant for all at-risk children from 3 to 6 years of age, an update that benefited over 2 million children. In addition, in 2022, some 80,000 adolescent mothers and their families received parenting and vocational training, as well as access to relevant health and social services, childcare and legal assistance.

123. Thailand recognized the need to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. In February 2023, the Government had worked with UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union to organize the first-ever national conference on children in the digital age. It had also launched the Thailand Safe Internet Coalition to promote digital literacy and address online risks.

124. The mental and emotional challenges of children should be addressed proactively. In the light of the fact that children spent a great amount of time at school, educational institutions should learn to identify the early signs of mental distress and to respond effectively. Thailand had launched a campaign that was aimed at destigmatizing mental health issues, helping teachers to identify children who needed support and fostering

constructive communication among teachers, parents and students.

125. **Mr. Mohamed** (Egypt) said that, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the family was the natural and fundamental unit of society and entitled to protection by the State. Through the family, children gained the ability to become effective members of society.

126. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General on the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on girls and the recovery from it (A/78/284), the pandemic had adversely affected the access of more than 1 billion children, especially girls, to education. Strengthened international cooperation was needed to overcome those pandemic-related obstacles, as quality education was integral to an enabling environment for children and the enjoyment of their rights. Such cooperation was also needed to reduce the scientific divide between countries and to provide quality teachers and scholarships in developing countries.

127. Egypt was committed to implementing programmes aimed at achieving a balance between available resources and population growth. To that end, the Government was implementing the Decent Life initiative, which was aimed at fostering inclusive development in all governorates. The initiative had contributed to reduced school attrition rates, which in turn had resulted in reduced rates of child labour and delinquency. The Government was also implementing a project to support Egyptian families with the aim of improving quality of life. The project provided parents with support to ensure that every child obtained appropriate education, nutrition and health care. The Government was also intent on ensuring that migrant and refugee children in Egypt were able to access education. More support was needed from the international community to allow host countries such as Egypt to continue their efforts.

128. **Ms. Stadnicka** (Poland), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her country spared no effort in working towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 2 on zero hunger. In that regard, her Government continued to support the activities of the World Food Programme and of relevant Polish non-governmental organizations.

129. Children were disproportionately affected by conflict. At the outbreak of the unprovoked and unjustified Russian aggression on Ukraine, people in Poland had welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees, many of them children. However, that aggression remained fresh in the memories of refugee children, and many suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as a

result. It was essential that the international community take immediate action to address that cruelty. While Poland welcomed the prompt action of the International Criminal Court in issuing arrest warrants for the President of the Russian Federation and the Commissioner for Children's Rights in relation to the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children, additional international action was needed to protect children in accordance with international law.

130. Special emphasis should be placed on the rights of members of historically oppressed and underrepresented groups, in particular children with disabilities and children belonging to minority groups.

131. **Ms. Zoghbi** (Lebanon) said that multiple crises over the past four years had taken a heavy toll on the health and well-being of her country's children. In addition to experiencing one of the worst global economic crises since the nineteenth century, Lebanon had also faced challenges stemming from the Beirut port blast and the continued presence of more than 1.5 displaced Syrians. Lebanese public schools had been experiencing severe hardships since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2019. People struggled to send their children to school and teachers had gone on repeated strikes as their salaries had dramatically lost value. According to UNICEF, at least 15 per cent of households had taken their children out of school and 52 per cent had reduced their education spending. Despite challenges, however, public schools in Lebanon had opened their doors to displaced Syrian children so that they could enjoy their right to education. The international community was urged to increase its support to Lebanon in that regard.

132. Recent violent clashes in the Ein El Hilweh camp had forced the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to close schools, which affected more than 11,000 Palestinian refugee children. Children who were unable to access education were vulnerable to violence, poverty, extremism and were at increased risk of child labour and early marriage. United Nations agencies were urged to help the Lebanese Government to ensure that every child in Lebanon had the right to enjoy their childhood.

133. **Ms. Vmulisa** (Rwanda) said that her country had made substantial progress on children's rights. The Government, in collaboration with key ministries and institutions, had developed critical policies on the protection of children's rights, including a policy dedicated to the protection of children in cyberspace. In addition, Rwanda had cultivated a dedicated workforce, comprising social workers, psychologists, legal experts, law enforcement officials and community child

protection volunteers, who worked to prevent, identify and respond to instances of child abuse and neglect.

134. Significant improvements had been made with respect to education. Rwanda had implemented a policy of free primary education, and the country currently boasted a primary school enrolment rate of approximately 95 per cent. Rwanda had also forged partnerships with key stakeholders to develop a national strategy on gender and education that was aimed at raising awareness among parents and guardians about the benefits of education while addressing societal norms that negatively affected enrolment and learning. Rwanda had also achieved successes in the area of health care. Between 2000 and 2015, Rwanda had achieved the highest average annual reduction globally in both under-five mortality and maternal mortality rates, which was the result of targeted investments in the health-care system.

135. While Rwanda had made steady progress in its national development objectives, barriers remained that hindered the full realization of children's rights. The child protection system must be reinforced, and investments were needed in early childhood health and quality education. Her delegation urged the international community to act promptly and consistently to eliminate human rights violations against children around the world and to uphold international child rights laws and standards.

136. **Ms. Rodríguez Mancía** (Guatemala) said that, since 2019, her country had been implementing the Model of Comprehensive Care for Children and Adolescents, which provided for urgent care that was gender-sensitive and culturally relevant. Laws had recently been enacted to combat bullying and to eradicate malnutrition through the provision of school meals. In 2022, a national plan on the prevention of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking in persons had been launched, which had a particular focus on children and young people.

137. Guatemala, like its counterparts in the region, was a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants and was a site of trafficking in persons. Her delegation was particularly concerned about trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, a form of modern slavery. The international community must redouble its efforts to combat that scourge and protect migrant children.

138. Her delegation was also concerned about abuse of children during armed conflicts, which persisted despite international efforts. Guatemala condemned child recruitment and called on the parties to conflicts to engage in peace talks in good faith. It also condemned indiscriminate attacks on hospitals and schools and the

use of chemical weapons, which had caused the deaths of thousands of children. Guatemala was especially alarmed by the devastating aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the abduction and transfer of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation, which was a crime under international law.

139. Since the takeover of power by the Taliban, the human rights situation for girls in Afghanistan had deteriorated. Measures had been implemented to restrict the access of girls to education and health care and to impede their freedom of movement and expression.

140. **Ms. Fango** (Philippines) said that her country had introduced laws and policies to promote and protect the rights of children in the contexts of conflict, climate change and disasters. The Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act had been enacted to protect the fundamental rights of children before, during and after disasters and other emergency situations. Laws had also been adopted to protect children in situations of armed conflict and to provide critical intervention in early childhood in order to ensure optimal development.

141. To ensure that children were kept safe in online environments, Congress had in 2022 passed a law that criminalized the production, distribution or possession of child sexual abuse material. The law stipulated that Internet service providers, content hosts, social networking sites and financial institutions were obliged to block such material. It also allocated services for the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims.

142. The Philippines facilitated the participation of children in all matters that affected them. The National Framework on Child Participation established minimum standards in that regard, and the National Strategic Plan on Child Participation was aimed at fostering the participation of children in the community, at school and in other institutions. A guidebook on child participation had been developed in 2023 that addressed children's participation in the contexts of public health crises and policymaking.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*