



# Security Council

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New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Sangjin Kim . . . . . (Republic of Korea)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Koudri
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Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Carpenter
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Xheleshi
United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Luquetta

## Agenda

### Children and armed conflict

How to advance our collective norms towards protecting children and ending all grave violations

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384)

Letter dated 12 June 2024 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2024/468)

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*The meeting was suspended on Wednesday, 26 June and resumed at 3.20 p.m. on Thursday, 27 June.*

**The President:** I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after three minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Andorra.

**Mr. Kallis Baldrich** (Andorra) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. At the outset, I would like to thank the presidency of the Republic of Korea for convening this open debate. I am also grateful for the important contributions made by Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and the Secretary-General in his report (S/2024/384), the representative of UNICEF, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the child survivor and his story.

Andorra aligns itself with the statements delivered by the Head of Delegation of the European Union and by the representative of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Twenty-five years after the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1261 (1999), the importance of ensuring and following up on the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda has become more evident every day and further informed by knowledge and experience. In that regard, agreements have been reached with armed groups and forces to secure the release and the reintegration of children, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the actions of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the adoption of resolutions that have expanded the scope of the rights of children during conflicts.

Nevertheless, the Secretary-General's report before us today paints a bleak and deeply alarming picture. The number of verified cases of the gravest violations increased by an estimated 21 per cent in 2023, as compared to the previous year, and seem unlikely to decrease this year, for a number of reasons. They include the documented killing and maiming of children, whether as recruits or as victims of armed attacks. Explosive weapons and mines are particularly cruel, and in that context we should point to the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the

Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We are particularly concerned about sexual violence against children, which has a disproportionate effect on girls. No one should ever have to endure such treatment. We continue to see attacks on schools and hospitals and their misuse for military purposes, depriving children of basic rights such as education and health care. The denial of humanitarian assistance, particularly for children, contravenes international humanitarian law and related resolutions, and must not be tolerated.

We have to halt the documented increase in the most serious violations, but that can be done only through the will of the parties and a joint effort in support of the resources and instruments needed to establish good practices — humanitarian law, the relevant Council resolutions, the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver agreements and, in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, which constitute the key framework for the promotion of child welfare. We urge States that have not yet ratified those instruments to do so and to keep children at the centre of their priorities.

The international community has established the foundations we need to uphold those commitments. In ensuring the effectiveness of the children and armed conflict agenda, action plans and compliance with international law attest to the political will needed to resolve specific situations and demonstrate the commitment of the parties involved. Appointing and training adequate personnel are essential, especially in preventing further violations and reintegrating survivors. In that context, justice plays a vital role in preventing impunity, and we stress the role of the International Criminal Court in that regard.

During armed conflicts children not only suffer the consequences of political crises but bear the brunt of the climate crisis, an issue that demands greater attention. Andorra has been able to contribute in that area.

In conclusion, I would like to express our appreciation for the work of United Nations staff, the Organization's various agencies and the civil society entities concerned with the various aspects of the issue on the ground. Andorra will continue to cooperate with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and to further that cause.

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

**Mr. Larsen** (Australia): I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of Canada, New Zealand and my own country, Australia (CANZ). We thank the Republic of Korea for convening today's open debate.

CANZ recognizes the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and her Office, to protect children affected by armed conflict. The Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) presents findings of serious concern. A 21 per cent increase in grave violations committed against children during armed conflict and a 35 per cent increase in instances of killing and maiming of children are totally unacceptable. That equates to more than 22,000 innocent children affected across 26 situations. Those are reportedly the highest numbers ever recorded by the Secretary-General. And given the high thresholds and challenges for verification, they do not represent the full scale of violations against children. It is particularly troubling that State forces are the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and denials of humanitarian assistance.

CANZ firmly condemns any grave violations committed against children by any State or party and in any conflict. We strongly urge all States, including the newly listed State actors — the Israeli armed and security forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces — to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We call for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Sudan, especially schools, hospitals, water and sanitation systems, and for the facilitation of safe and unhindered humanitarian access. And we are appalled by the reported widespread abduction and forced transfer of Ukrainian children by the Russian Federation, which remains listed for grave violations against children in Ukraine. We reiterate our call to Russia to immediately end its illegal and unjustified war of aggression. We remain deeply concerned about the reported ongoing killing and maiming of children in the conflict in Yemen, and in particular the Houthis' recruitment of child soldiers.

CANZ also calls for the six newly listed non-State armed groups — the Islamic State in the greater Sahara, the Alliance des forces de résistance congolaises, Hamas's Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam brigades and affiliated factions, Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds brigades, the Rapid Support Forces and the Third Front-Tamazuj

in the Sudan — to immediately cease their violations against children. We reiterate our calls for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza, the protection of civilians, the immediate release of hostages and safe, unimpeded and sustained access for humanitarian supplies to enable the provision of life-saving support for civilians in Gaza. It is imperative that all children, in all conflicts, are protected.

CANZ calls on all parties to armed conflict to comply fully with their legal obligations and end all grave violations against children. We encourage all States to join and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. We reaffirm our support for international justice and accountability mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. We encourage all States Members of the United Nations to increase the resources they allocate to supporting monitoring, reporting and data collection regarding grave violations against children. That collection is an essential component of protecting children in at-risk situations.

CANZ recognizes the role that action plans can play to end and prevent grave violations against children. To better protect children in armed conflict, we urge parties to work with the United Nations to sign and implement action plans with concrete and time-bound steps. We have a collective responsibility to foster a world that is safe and preserves the rights of children during the horrors of armed conflict.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

**Ms. Shaheen** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to note that the United Arab Emirates associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, and to thank the briefers for their comprehensive statements.

The world is dealing with the largest number of armed conflicts it has seen since the Second World War, and children are among the most vulnerable to the dangers of war. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/384), violations committed against children — including sexual violence, recruitment and killing and maiming — have increased significantly over the past year. Against that backdrop, the international community must reiterate its demands on all parties to comply with international law, including international humanitarian law, and to cease their violations. We

also call on all parties newly listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report to work closely with the Special Representative to develop appropriate measures to protect children. In the context of today's discussion, I would like to emphasize three issues.

First, we cannot accept the imposition by parties to conflicts of a reality in which humanitarian aid is prevented from reaching those in need, especially children. That is urgent, since it puts children at risk of malnutrition and starvation. The international community has repeatedly called for safe and unhindered humanitarian access, including through Security Council resolutions, but in vain. It is important to understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring humanitarian access in conflict. The Security Council should leverage all the tools at its disposal, including by developing mechanisms to improve flows of humanitarian assistance and to facilitate, monitor and verify the delivery of aid at scale. A case in point is the mechanism established by resolution 2720 (2023).

Secondly, our approach to protecting children from armed conflict must be comprehensive, focusing on prevention and enabling the participation of all relevant actors. That includes United Nations peace missions, which should be specifically designed to protect children by including child protection advisers and building the capacity of national institutions and local communities to address and prevent the six types of grave violations, so that the countries in question are prepared to face those challenges after the missions are withdrawn.

Thirdly, children, both girls and boys, must be guaranteed access to quality education even during conflicts. As we have said before, technology must be leveraged to facilitate safe and uninterrupted access to education, including by supporting and financing digital education initiatives and providing educational institutions and students with the tools they need. However, that does not mean replacing schools themselves, which must be protected.

Before I conclude, it would be remiss of me not to bring up the situation of Palestinian children created by the current war in the Gaza Strip. As the Secretary-General said, Gaza has become a graveyard for children. Save the Children has estimated that as many as 21,000 children have gone missing in the war. Moreover, the children who survive in Gaza are likely to face severe trauma all their life, especially those orphaned or

maimed as a result of bombardment and violence. An immediate ceasefire is urgently needed in Gaza and all conflict areas.

In conclusion, I want to stress that the United Arab Emirates is deeply committed to protecting children in situations of armed conflict, in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council frameworks and in cooperation with international partners.

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

**Mr. Al-Fatlawi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*):** At the outset, I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for its effective role and distinctive presidency of the Security Council during the month of June, and the briefers for their statements.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

I would like to remind the Council of a principle that may seem obvious to all, which is that the protection of children, regardless of their gender, religion, nationality or location, is a responsibility that we must all shoulder in all cases. However, it seems that in this area there are special cases where certain parties are given impunity to flagrantly violate that principle, along with international law and international humanitarian law.

The terrible situation of children's rights in the Palestinian occupied territories is deteriorating daily, with the occupying Power arresting innocent children on pretexts of having secret security files. Children are being detained in prisons that destroy their childhood and deny them their right to education and to live with their families in a safe and healthy environment. The international community has unfortunately turned a blind eye to those dangerous arbitrary actions, which in a number of cases have amounted to enforced disappearance, with nothing known about the state of children's health and living conditions in the occupation's prisons. Moreover, the number of children that the occupying Power has killed in cold blood now exceeds 14,500. On top of that, more than 32 hospitals have been destroyed, denying children access to health care. The occupying Power is also using starvation as a weapon of war to kill children, particularly those with disabilities, in clear violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We therefore call on the international community to

take the urgent measures needed to put a stop to the occupying authority's crimes against every sector of Palestinian society, especially children, and to alleviate their suffering.

I would like to thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her efforts and constructive cooperation with the relevant authorities in Iraq in implementing the one-year action plan signed on 30 March 2023 in Baghdad between the Government of the Republic of Iraq and the United Nations, based on joint cooperation between the two parties to prevent violations related to the recruitment and use of children. The authorities have been fully committed to implementing it, and the joint work formed a background to the successful visit of the Special Representative and her team to Iraq in January, in which she highlighted Iraq's commitment to facing the challenges related to the protection and promotion of children's rights through the measures taken based on the provisions of the action plan.

I would now like to review the most significant action taken regarding the protection of children's rights in Iraq. The national committee for monitoring and reporting, together with the National Security Advisory, has focused on children returning from Al-Hol camp in the Syrian Arab Republic and on reviewing their condition and the programmes prepared for their reintegration. An integrated, specialized psychological and social programme has been developed for their rehabilitation, together with a permanent and specialized national team formed to work on the children's psychological rehabilitation. The Government of Iraq is continuing its ongoing efforts to repatriate its citizens. On 28 April, a fifteenth batch of Iraqi citizens from Al-Hol were repatriated, with 8,901 people arriving at the Al-Jad'a centre in Iraq for psychological and community rehabilitation and 5,814 reintegrated into their original communities. The number of children repatriated from Al-Hol now exceeds 2,250. Despite all those efforts, there are multiple challenges, the most important of which is the children who lost their parents and do not have proof of paternity. In such circumstances, the relevant authorities are making every effort to search throughout the country for the children's parents. However, those efforts require time and great effort to provide the best for every child on a case-by-case basis. In that regard, we welcome the efforts undertaken by UNICEF, in

cooperation with the competent authorities, to establish paternity and ensure that children can return to their areas of origin. The delegation of my country affirms that, in order to reach a lasting solution to that issue, States must assume their responsibility to repatriate their nationals who are living in Al-Hol camp in the Syrian Arab Republic so that women and children can be rehabilitated and reintegrated while ensuring that the perpetrators of the crimes are held accountable.

With regard to criminal accountability, a competent national commission conducted a review of the Juvenile Welfare Act and issued an important recommendation of raising the age of criminal responsibility from 9 to 12 years of age.

Another issue that deserves the Council's attention is that of the foreign children present in Iraq one of whose parents has joined a terrorist group or the children who were born in prisons. Iraq is committed to fulfilling its humanitarian, moral and legal duties to them, and urges States to assume their responsibility to facilitate the repatriation of children who are their nationals and are living in camps or care facilities. We have seen some response and cooperation by certain countries which have already repatriated their minor nationals. In that regard, I thank all States that responded to that repatriation appeal. I also call on those States that have not cooperated on that humanitarian issue to take the necessary steps to protect their children and their future.

In conclusion, Iraq affirms that children are victims in all situations, and every measure must be taken to protect them and address the difficult circumstances they experience in conflict and post-conflict situations. However, that is the collective responsibility of all countries. We echo the call of Secretary-General António Guterres in 2019 to all States to cooperate with Iraq on the issue of repatriating children, and we call on the Security Council once again to urge States to assume their responsibility towards children who are their nationals to ensure that they are repatriated before the situation becomes more dire in the near future.

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

**Mr. Tun (Myanmar):** I wish to begin by thanking the presidency of the Republic of Korea for convening this open debate. I thank former United Nations Secretary-General and Deputy Chair of The Elders Mr. Ban Ki-moon; the Special Representative of the Secretary-

General for Children and Armed Conflict Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter; the Deputy Executive Director of Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations of UNICEF, Mr. Ted Chaiban; and the child briefer for their comprehensive statements on this important issue. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her team for preparing the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) and citing in the report the conditions of children during times of armed conflict in Myanmar.

Myanmar is dismayed to recognize various United Nations agencies' reports indicating the increased challenges faced by children during armed conflicts in various parts of the world, such as in the Sudan, Congo, Haiti, Ukraine, Gaza and my own country, Myanmar. The fact that the number of verified grave violations reached 32,990 is very concerning. We therefore continue to express our deep sympathy for those children affected by armed conflicts. The challenges of children in different countries facing armed conflicts may vary in form, yet the endured pain and harm are identical. We all must bear in mind that children are our future.

In the case of Myanmar, grave violations against children continue to significantly increase owing to the attempted military coup and the atrocities committed by the junta since February 2021. We have vividly witnessed the fact that the junta has committed abductions and detentions, killings, rape and sexual violence, forced recruitment and use of children as human shields and attacks against schools and hospitals and related personnel. At the same time, indiscriminate, systemic and targeted aerial attacks and the shelling of educational establishments, as well as the use of improvised explosive devices and mines, are some of the many dangerous atrocities consistently committed by the junta.

Children in Myanmar are paying a high price for the attempted military coup and the atrocities of the junta, which has deprived their right to education and health. It is deeply saddening to repeatedly witness our children's loss of safe learning opportunities and see them studying inside bunkers and make-shift camps in the conflict-affected areas. Moreover, a significant number of children have not been able to access basic health and nutrition interventions.

Furthermore, the military junta's recent forced conscription exacerbated the suffering of the people, including children. Following the junta's announcement of forced conscription, every household, especially families with children, were instilled with fear. Many youths, even those under the age of 18, are hiding and fleeing the country to escape being unlawfully conscripted and used as human shields.

Against that backdrop, Myanmar notes with serious concern that the conclusion of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on the issue of Myanmar has been pending since 2021. That is indeed adding another layer of challenges to the already dire situation on the ground. We have repeatedly called for effective action from the international community, including the Security Council. Our calls have not yet been fulfilled. As such, the people of Myanmar, in particular women, youth and children, are bearing the brunt of that lack of effective action.

The National Unity Government of Myanmar has been cooperating with relevant United Nations entities for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. A set of guidelines on prevention and the protection of children affected in armed conflict in Myanmar has been developed. The Ministry of Defence of the National Unity Government has accordingly instructed its forces to abide by the code of conduct and its regulations and to refrain from committing any of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. The National Unity Government and its relevant ministries welcome complaints and are committed to monitoring, reviewing, investigating and holding accountable those involved in committing such crimes. I wish to reiterate that we respect and are committed to upholding the principles of international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We definitely need help from United Nations agencies and others to strengthen our capacity in the area of the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. We are of the view that flagrant violations of those principles negatively contribute to and are major causes of the contemporary challenges of children in armed conflict. Violators and perpetrators must be held accountable. In that respect, the military junta and its brutal acts are the clear root causes of the tragedies befalling our children and our young people.

Given the surging displacement, food insecurity, poverty, hunger and forced conscription, unhindered humanitarian assistance and access must be placed

at the forefront in addressing the issue. Although the National Unity Government, together with ethnic resistance organizations, civil society organizations and the people of Myanmar, are trying their best to provide assistance to the people in need, including children, we still need adequate assistance from United Nations agencies and donors. I call on Member States to please help us to save our children. Importantly, the Security Council can do more to address the issue of Myanmar. The military junta's complete disregard of resolution 2669 (2022) on Myanmar is as a threat to the mandate, authority and power of the Council.

I understand that the Council is still divided on addressing the issue of Myanmar. In that regard, I wish to draw Council members' attention to the military junta's misinformation and disinformation campaign. The junta irresponsibly shifts blame to the people and resistances forces whenever incidents occur. Allow me to provide a recent example. On 19 June 2024, the junta forces shot at a car with three passengers in Mandalay. One renowned monk was killed on the spot, and another renowned monk and the driver were injured. Initially, the junta accused the People's Defence Force for the shooting. However, following a public statement by the injured monk, the junta eventually admitted that it was junta soldiers who shot at the car.

I urge Member States to be mindful of the junta's misinformation/disinformation campaign and to not buy its fabricated information, disseminated via the junta-controlled Myanmar embassies and media outlets. In this technologically advanced and open society, there are a great many sources available to verify the news. Please wake up and put humankind first. Save our children and save our people. Please bring a future back to the people, especially our children and our young people.

As a father of five-year-old son and a 16-year-old daughter, I once again appeal, with very heavy and painful heart, to the international community to impose greater pressure on the military junta by cutting off their arms, weapons, jet fuel and financial flows.

Meanwhile, an integrated and holistic approach must be pursued to fully resolve the issue in Myanmar. It is our intention to bring peace and stability to Myanmar, for the sake of not only the country, but also the region and beyond.

The issue of grave violations against children in armed conflicts in Myanmar cannot be resolved

unless the military junta ends its unlawful coup and dictatorship and is held accountable. I therefore wish to end by calling on the international community to support — through all viable means — our dedicated efforts to build a federal democratic union that is for the people and by the people.

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

**Mr. Feruță (Romania):** Romania aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to echo the concerns expressed yesterday by Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and other briefers, as well as by representatives of several delegations, including our colleague from Myanmar, about the increase of grave violations against children in armed conflicts worldwide.

The figures in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/384) are bleak. They present extreme levels of violence and a massive failure to protect one of the most vulnerable categories. The sombre situation affecting children from Israel and the Palestinian territories to the Sudan, Myanmar and Ukraine results from insecurity and conflict. It is also a consequence of acts of defiance and non-compliance with international humanitarian law by armed forces and non-State armed groups. Combating impunity is crucial for upholding justice and accountability. It is essential that those who violate international human rights law and international humanitarian law, especially when children are the victims, are held accountable, without fail.

My country is a State steadfastly dedicated to advocating for children's rights and ensuring the protection of children. Recently, Romania joined the emergency call for action to ensure the respect for Palestinian children's rights and scaled up principled humanitarian action in Gaza and the West Bank, which was announced at this year's European Humanitarian Forum. It is vital to prioritize unrestricted humanitarian access to areas affected by the conflict, thus ensuring that essential aid reaches children whose lives have been profoundly disrupted.

Closer to our borders, Romania is actively calling for accountability for violations of children's rights across Ukraine. We are directly involved in international efforts to investigate human rights and humanitarian law abuses. Romania supports the establishment of an international coalition to facilitate

the return of Ukrainian children who have been deported or forcibly displaced by Russia from occupied Ukrainian territories. It is our view that monitoring illegally deported or displaced Ukrainian children will help restore their rights and contribute to peace and justice globally.

The children and armed conflict agenda has proved its enormous significance over the past 25 years. Looking to the future, my country supports including specific provisions on children and armed conflict in the mandate of peacekeeping operations and political special missions whenever the situation in the field requires it. Special follow-up mechanisms should be put in place to ensure transfer of knowledge and capacities whenever there is a transition or change of mission, with the view to strengthening protection by taking into account the principle of the best interest of the child. Taking action now against the disturbing rising grave violations against children is imperative. Protecting children's rights and welfare, irrespective of nationality or circumstance, should be a collective commitment and shared responsibility, including of this organ.

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

**Mrs. González López** (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): El Salvador is grateful for the holding of this open debate on children and armed conflict. We also thank the various briefers for their presentation.

The full version of this statement will be made available through the Secretariat.

My country is also grateful for the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2024/384), which is an important reference for the work of the Security Council and the United Nations in addressing the impact of armed conflict on girls and boys. My country pays tribute to all United Nations officials and humanitarian personnel and all those who work tirelessly in order to protect children in conflict.

El Salvador strongly condemns all forms of violence against girls and boys in armed conflict. We are deeply concerned that this violence has reached extreme levels in 2023, with the highest number of grave violations in almost 10 years. It is absolutely unacceptable that girls and boys continue to bear the brunt of crises and wars.

Allow me to take this opportunity to make a number of points.

First, we ask that the Security Council continue to address the grave crisis facing the rights of girls and boys in armed conflict. Discussions of violations of their rights must be transformed into concrete measures and resources to prevent and combat such violations.

Secondly, given its profound impact on girls and boys, the denial of humanitarian access during conflict must end.

Thirdly, attacks on civilian objects, including schools and hospitals, must cease. Parties must also remove explosive ordnance, provide risk education in that regard and assist its victims, particularly children.

Fourthly, in connection with other conventional arms control processes, we call for an analysis of the risks of arms diversion, including in areas of armed conflict, which can lead to the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, as well as their parts, components and ammunition.

Fifthly, in line with the Secretary-General's recommendations, we believe that it is crucial that child protection measures and capacities be incorporated into the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Child protection strategies backed by adequate resources that are sustainable over time should be put in place before peacekeeping operations draw down.

Sixthly, we note with deep concern that girls and children with disabilities, and displaced and otherwise marginalized children, are particularly vulnerable to grave violations. While rape and other forms of sexual violence disproportionately affect girls, boys were the primary victims of recruitment, use and abduction. We urgently call for their protection and assistance to be tailored to their particular needs.

The United Nations verified the alarming figure of 32,990 grave violations committed against 22,557 girls and boys in 2023. Let me be clear — that is intolerable and unacceptable. With those figures in mind, let me conclude by echoing the words of the Special Representative in her briefing to the Council yesterday:

“Behind every incident of violation of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict lies the unique, abhorrent experience of one child”.

We cannot forget that. It is in the Council's power to change that reality. At a time when conflicts are becoming increasingly complex, we call on all Member



States, all parties to conflict and all the actors involved to redouble their efforts at every level to prevent, halt, mitigate and end the suffering of so many children in situations of armed conflict. Once again, members have an immense responsibility.

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

**Mr. Vichankaiyakij** (Thailand): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate the Republic of Korea on its presidency of the Security Council this month and to express my appreciation for its organization of this very important debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2024/384) and all the briefers for their contributions. In addressing the challenges underlined in the Secretary-General's report, Thailand would like to underscore the following points.

First, it is essential to implement protective measures during a conflict. Establishing rapid response teams of child protection specialists can help ensure swift intervention. At the same time, strict adherence to international law, norms and standards helps protect children from the disproportionate impact of conflicts.

Secondly, international diplomatic engagement is needed to build trust and negotiate safe passage for aid workers and supplies in conflict zones. Thailand supports the development of a guidance note on denials of humanitarian access in order to strengthen international cooperation and facilitate timely assistance to children in need.

Thirdly, the transition period following the withdrawal of United Nations peacekeeping operations presents unique challenges. Thailand advocates the inclusion of child protection measures and training in all peacekeeping mandates to ensure a seamless transition and sustained support for children.

Fourthly, education must continue even in times of conflict. Mobile and online learning can play an important role in that regard. It is also crucial to create platforms for dialogue among all stakeholders in order to ensure children's safe access to education and health care.

Lastly, protecting and supporting children recruited by armed groups requires comprehensive rehabilitation programmes that provide psychological support, education and training opportunities. We believe that community-based approaches are crucial to sustainable

reintegration. Of course, long-term monitoring can go a long way to preventing re-recruitment.

Thailand has been actively addressing the issues faced by children affected by armed conflict. We have put in place safe shelters and child protection services in border areas, providing children with essential support and care, in close collaboration with partners such as UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in particular.

In conclusion, child protection, particularly in conflict situations, requires collective determination and innovative and multidimensional strategies. Thailand stands ready to engage with the international community and with children, particularly on technical cooperation and capacity-building initiatives, to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard and acted on.

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

**Mr. Amorín** (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay thanks the Republic of Korea and the presidency of the Council for convening this open debate and enabling States that are not members of the Council to express themselves on the particularly relevant issue of children and armed conflict.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada, on behalf of the 49 States members of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and I would like to add the following statement in my national capacity.

We are meeting today in the face of worrisome trends highlighted in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384), covering the period from January to December 2023 and mandated by resolution 2427 (2018).

First, Uruguay expresses its deep concern at the alarming 21 per cent increase in grave violations against children in armed conflict in 2023, including a significant 35 per cent increase in incidents of killing and maiming. Those unprecedented statistics, in places such as Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly Gaza, and in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and Ukraine, underscore a tragic reality. Children continue to bear the brunt of armed conflict in appalling ways that violate their most fundamental rights and deny them a future of peace and stability. We concur with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for

Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, who noted that the annual report is a wake-up call. We join her in this warning and in her call for the international community to recommit to the universal consensus on protecting children from armed conflict, as well as for States to fulfil their primary responsibility to protect their populations and to respect all applicable norms and standards in the conduct of situations of armed conflict.

We cannot fail to note that while more than half of the violations were committed by non-State armed groups, including those designated as terrorists by the United Nations, Government forces, which are bound by international humanitarian law, were the main perpetrators of killings and maimings, attacks on schools and hospitals and denials of humanitarian access. We are also concerned about armed attacks targeting education institutions, which disproportionately affect girls and perpetuate cycles of inequality. Persistent levels of sexual violence against girls in conflict zones further compound those challenges and hinder progress towards gender equality and sustainable development.

In response to those serious concerns, Uruguay stresses the need to ensure strict compliance with international humanitarian law and urges all Member States to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to endorse the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. We also recognize the crucial role of humanitarian access in providing essential services to children affected by conflict, in strict compliance with resolution 2286 (2016), which requires all parties to armed conflicts to facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for medical and humanitarian personnel. The neutral, impartial and independent nature of humanitarian aid must be safeguarded and respected at all times.

In conclusion, Uruguay reaffirms its commitment to working to advance collective measures to protect children in armed conflict. To that end, we urge the Security Council and all Member States to take decisive action to prevent and address grave violations against children, hold perpetrators accountable and ensure that children are protected and given the opportunity to rebuild their lives free from the horrors of conflict.

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

**Mr. Blanco Conde** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Republic of Korea for its leadership, and the briefers for their valuable contributions.

I would like to begin on a positive note, but it is impossible to do so. The impact of armed conflicts on children is a gaping wound in our humanity. That wound has grown even deeper over the past year, as evidenced by the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/384) on the subject. More than 32,900 grave violations against children were verified in 2023, a 21 per cent increase as compared to the previous year. Behind those wrenching statistics, we find the lives, dashed dreams and devastated hopes of young people in countries such as Palestine, Afghanistan, the Sudan, Ukraine, Somalia, Yemen and our neighbour Haiti. Each figure represents a person — and an innocent one at that. Each statistic tells the story of the pain and loss of a family, a community and a nation. We cannot allow ourselves to remain impassive to this escalating violence. The international community must respond firmly and in solidarity.

The denial of humanitarian access remains a critical challenge, with 5,200 incidents reported last year. As a result, children are being deprived of access to education, food and medical care, each of which constitute fundamental rights. There is an urgent need to strengthen our child protection mechanisms. Transitions from United Nations peacekeeping missions and special political missions to United Nations country teams must be handled in a careful and responsible manner in order to ensure that children continue to receive the assistance they need in fragile contexts. That is particularly pertinent in contexts such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the transition from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo presents significant challenges to the protection of children in that country.

On this side of the world, the violence being perpetrated by gangs in Haiti continues to have detrimental effects on children. It is our hope that, with the support of the Multinational Security Support Mission recently deployed in that fraternal country and that of the entire international community, security can be restored as soon as possible in order not only to mitigate the risk of direct violence against children, but also to create more stable conditions that enable

children to receive adequate education, health-care and protection services.

We must redouble our efforts to support and strengthen the children and armed conflict agenda, including such tools as the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the conclusions adopted by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, with a view to ensuring accountability and ending impunity. At the same time, we call upon all conflicting parties to fulfil their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, while ensuring accountability for all violations perpetrated against children in situations of armed conflict. There is no room for impunity, particularly when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable among us.

The Dominican Republic endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles. It also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, thereby attesting to my country's commitment to that end. We therefore call upon all States that have yet to endorse and ratify those instruments to do so.

The future of our human race hinges on the well-being of our children today. We must not fail them. Let us demonstrate with our actions that we are on the side of justice and dignity for all children affected by armed conflict, wherever they may be.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Ahmadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important open debate. I also thank Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the other briefers for their contributions.

International law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, protects civilians and children during armed conflicts. Several United Nations resolutions also emphasize those protections. However, children suffer disproportionately from the impact of wars, as reports of grave violations increase. The recent report by the Secretary-General (S/2024/384) indicates that there has been a 21 per cent increase in grave violations against children in conflict zones and a 35 per cent rise in killing and maiming.

The Middle East remains a tragic witness to appalling violations of children's rights, from

Afghanistan to Yemen and Palestine. The situation in Gaza, particularly the targeting of Palestinian children, is deeply troubling, within the broader context of Israel's ongoing genocidal war against the Palestinian people. For more than nine months, Israel, the occupying regime, has waged a genocidal war and military aggression against the defenceless Palestinian people, flagrantly violating all international legal rules, principles and norms, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That regime brazenly employs every possible means to decimate civilian populations, including the use of starvation as a method of warfare; the indiscriminate targeting of women and children; deliberate assault on civilian infrastructure, especially schools, hospitals and residential areas; and obstruction of the provision of essential humanitarian aid and services to civilians, in direct violation of Security Council resolutions.

According to the Secretary-General's report, Israel is responsible for 5,698 violations, including the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. The Secretary-General placed the Israeli armed forces on the list of perpetrators of grave violations against children in armed conflicts. Since the start of the Israeli aggression against Palestinians in October of last year, an estimated 13,450 children have been killed in Gaza, and thousands more have been injured. Meanwhile, the number of children suffering from severe malnutrition continues to rise sharply as access to adequate food and safe water dwindles. Through the intentional targeting of children and civilians, Israel has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, in flagrant violation of the basic norms and principles of international humanitarian law.

Israel continues to violate Security Council resolutions. Those resolutions demand that Israel, the occupying regime, comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law, notably concerning the protection of civilians, and allow for full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access into and throughout the entire Gaza Strip. That regime is fully responsible for those serious violations and must be held accountable. Holding Israel accountable is necessary to deter future violations and ensure justice for the victims.

The international community must prioritize the protection of children in armed conflicts. Regardless of the circumstances, their rights, safety and well-being must always be safeguarded. To that end, all conflicting parties must comply fully and effectively with

international humanitarian law. It is equally imperative to address the root causes of conflicts. Tackling such issues as poverty and limited access to quality education and employment opportunities is crucial in mitigating such violations. In addition, illegal unilateral sanctions can exacerbate the plight of children in conflict-affected areas and must be addressed.

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

**Mr. Mc Bean** (Ireland): Ireland aligns itself with the statement by the representative of the European Union and the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

At the outset, I wish to welcome the convening of this debate and to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2024/384). I also want to thank our briefers for their tireless work to ensure the protection of children and for their compelling and sobering insights.

The report before us today reveals an abhorrent and worsening reality for children affected by armed conflict. It documents a drastic increase in grave violations against children in 2023, including stark increases in sexual violence against girls and the denial of humanitarian access to children. We strongly condemn the shocking 35 per cent increase in the killing and maiming of children and the high number of attacks on schools and hospitals, depriving children of their right to education and health care and exposing them to immense danger.

The highest numbers of grave violations were verified in Israel and Palestine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, Nigeria and the Sudan. We note that a number of State and non-State actors have been added to the list of those who have committed grave violations affecting children in armed conflict. They include the Israeli armed and security forces, Hamas's Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigades. They also include the Sudanese Armed Forces and a number of non-State armed groups in the Sudan, Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is surprising that many of those violations arose from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and we urge all those States that have not yet done so to endorse the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. The scale and

severity of violations indicate growing disregard for international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict by both State and non-State parties.

Much more must be done to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution and the obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access. We must also ensure accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law. Now more than ever, we must support the work of the International Criminal Court and other international justice mechanisms. We must act to end and prevent violations against children and to support and reintegrate those affected. We call on the international community to enhance its support for humanitarian and development interventions, including early childhood development initiatives, which reduce the harm that armed conflicts cause children. It is also essential to include child protection capacity in the relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions and to ensure that child protection frameworks are upheld during mission transitions. We are encouraged to see that United Nations engagement has led to a decrease in violations in certain contexts. We hope that further such progress can be made and, in that regard, call on all parties listed in the annexes to the report to engage constructively with the United Nations.

The impact of armed conflict on children is both immediate and long-lasting. It subjects the most vulnerable in our societies to physical harm and emotional distress, disrupts their access to essential services, undermines their psychosocial development and damages their future prospects. It is our collective responsibility to break that cycle and create a world in which every child can thrive in safety, dignity and peace, unburdened by the scourge of war.

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

**Ms. Alalawat** (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Republic of Korea for its efforts during its presidency of the Security Council this month and for convening this important open debate on the theme "Children and armed conflict: How to advance our collective norms towards protecting children and ending all grave violations". I would also like to thank all the briefers for their valuable briefings.

The most recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) points to the alarming increase in grave violations against children in armed conflict in 2023, with children bearing the brunt of the effects of an increasing number of deepening crises characterized by total disregard for children's rights. Against the backdrop of the devastating war in the Gaza Strip, which has been ongoing for more than eight months, the Strip is experiencing a catastrophic humanitarian situation, with an unprecedented number of grave violations against children. The Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates its call on the international community, and particularly on the members of the Council, to shoulder their responsibilities and implement international resolutions and the rules of international humanitarian law to impose an immediate, lasting and comprehensive ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, to protect innocent civilians and to increase the urgent, safe and sufficient flow of humanitarian assistance into the Gaza Strip. It is equally important to provide a safe environment to revive the peace process for a just and comprehensive peace. The brotherly Palestinian people should exercise their legitimate right to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Kingdom of Bahrain underscores that the protection of children in armed conflict is a human duty above being a legal one. While international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and laws issued by the Security Council, stipulate the protection of children in armed conflict, the numbers of children affected by conflicts continue to increase. During the thirty-third session of the Summit of the League of Arab States, hosted by Bahrain in May and chaired by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, my country was keen to achieve an Arab consensus on five initiatives and implementation mechanisms, focusing on those affected from conflicts and disputes in the Middle East and on providing the necessary services to ensure their access to educational and health services, of which they were deprived as a result of armed conflicts.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain will continue to support all efforts aimed at improving the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including refugees and internally displaced children, and intensifying the work of the international community to consolidate peace, security and stability

in conflict areas so that all children enjoy their rights, in particular their right to life, health and education, in a safe and prosperous environment.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Khaddour** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian Arab Republic was one of the first States to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and has consistently met its obligations to that Protocol. Moreover, in 1996, my country joined the list of States that adopted resolution 51/77, which established the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

In line with its obligations, in recent years, the Syrian State has adopted approved several laws and regulations related to child protection and care. In 2013, a law was passed containing an amendment to the penal code to criminalize the acts of recruiting children and involving them in combat and establishing a national plan to deal with children victims of recruitment. In 2021, law No. 21 on the rights of the child was also issued, aiming to strengthen the role of the State and its various institutions in child protection and care.

Over the years of the terrorist war imposed on Syria, the Syrian Government has been engaged in serious and constructive cooperation with the United Nations and its representatives, including those in charge of children and armed conflict. We have sent hundreds of official letters highlighting the magnitude of the crimes and grave violations committed by terrorist organizations and militias with the support and direct involvement of their sponsors, including recruiting large numbers of children into the ranks of those terrorist groups and brainwashing them with extremist terrorist ideology. The matter did not end there. Children who were displaced by terrorism were subjected to the most heinous abuses in some refugee camps, including forced and child marriage, recruitment, child labour, sexual violence and falling victim to human trafficking networks.

My country's delegation has consistently provided the Special Representative with comments and observations on the sections of her reports pertaining to Syria. However, none of those comments were mentioned in those reports. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has deliberately ignored our concerns and the information that we provided and has

adopted a highly hostile approach that is not in line with her professionalism and the objectivity required by her mandate. Perhaps that was an attempt on her side to divert the attention of the international community away from the true identities of the perpetrators of those crimes, namely, the terrorist organizations and militias and their operators in the Israeli occupation entity, the United States forces and the Turkish forces illegally present on the territory of my country.

A few days ago, the Special Representative announced that she had signed an agreement with an armed terrorist organization called the Syrian National Army and two terrorist entities that are allied with it, namely, Ahrar Al-Sham and Army of Islam, under the pretext of protecting children in areas where those organizations operate, at a time when those terrorist organizations continue to commit all types of grave violations against children, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, forced marriage, child marriage, torture, kidnapping and recruitment, not to mention the imposition of their extremist curricula replacing the official education curricula, which poses possibly the greatest danger of all. Those organizations operate under a broad umbrella of unaccountability and impunity provided by the countries that sponsor them, foremost of which are the United States Administration, which continues to prevent the inclusion of the terrorist entities Army of Islam and Ahrar al-Sham on the Security Council's lists of terrorists, and the Turkish regime.

Those armed terrorist entities, which have multiple names and loyalties, have committed the most horrific crimes and violations, which are in addition to those committed by the terrorist Jabhat Al-Nusra/Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and the terrorist Da'esh organization, during the years of the terrorist war against Syria. It would be naive to expect that such criminal organizations would uphold any commitments they make to the Special Representative. We have seen clearly that they do not do so in the case of the previous agreement concluded in 2019 by the Special Representative with the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, which are agents of the United States forces in north-eastern Syria. That agreement became the subject of a similar promotion campaign claiming it would put an end to the recruitment and use of children by those militias. Can we expect terrorist organizations to give us guarantees in that regard? The Syrian Democratic Forces continue to detain and to forcibly recruit children while

detaining tens of thousands of other children in illegal and inhumane detention centres in areas under their control, such as Gweiran prison, Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps and others.

As was the case with the previous agreement, the new so-called agreement is not in the interest of the child, as claimed by the Special Representative, but rather provides cover for those terrorist organizations and separatist militias to continue their human rights violations in Syria. It is nothing more than a miserable and suspicious attempt to legitimize the terrorist organizations and separatist militias and to burnish and promote their hideous reputations and criminal records and cover up their crimes.

The Special Representative's position over the past nine months of the genocide war and unprecedented violations against children at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip confirms the extent to which she is overstepping her mandate. That was clearly evident during her briefing to the Security Council on 3 April (see S/PV.9594), which compelled the Group of Arab States to take urgent action to reject her unacceptable behaviour, intentional violation of her mandate and attempt to cover up the consequences of the practices of the Israeli occupation with regard to children. She attempted to dismiss more than seven decades of crimes perpetrated by the occupying entity against children in the occupied Palestine and in the occupied Syrian Golan.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of the child, to providing an environment conducive to properly raising children and to continuing to make all possible efforts to provide them with support and care, despite the significant challenges it is facing owing to the practices of some Western States sponsors of terrorism and the unilateral coercive measures imposed on it. Syria is looking forward to furthering its efforts by receiving support for the rehabilitation of damaged civilian infrastructure, especially schools and health-care centres, and by providing support to children with cancer, children who are victims of mines planted by terrorist groups and children with disabilities, with a view to ensuring a better life for its future generations so that they may live in peace and tranquillity.

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

**Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for organizing this very important debate on the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. I would also like to thank the briefers for their statements, in particular the former United Nations Secretary-General and Deputy Chair of The Elders, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter; and the Deputy Executive Director of Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations of UNICEF, Mr. Ted Chaiban. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the child representative of civil society for his testimony.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

For several years now, and more specifically since the presentation of the Graça Machel report (A/51/306) to the General Assembly in 1996, which drew the world's attention to the specific needs of children in armed conflict, the international community has been mobilized to protect children in highly vulnerable situations. That mobilization has given rise to a global system, comprising a binding legal arsenal and soft law, which calls for the protection of children throughout the world, in particular in regions plagued by violence and war.

In today's conflicts, children are unfortunately the main victims. They are when they are directly affected. They are when their health and well-being are endangered and when their schools and education are targeted. They are when they are forcibly recruited by armed groups into the ranks of combatants. They are when they are sexually exploited and turned into slaves, when they are forced into prostitution and when they experience forced pregnancy or forced marriage. The Security Council has firmly condemned all those grave violations of children's rights.

With regard to the situation in Palestine, the Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its call for an immediate, lasting and verifiable ceasefire in Gaza to allow the smooth and unhindered delivery of sufficient humanitarian assistance and to ensure the urgent protection of civilians and humanitarian workers, in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. We call for the release of prisoners and detainees, with the obligation to provide a political

prospect to the Palestinian question to relaunch the two-State solution on the borders of 4 June 1967, as agreed by the international community.

Under the instruction of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, the Kingdom of Morocco launched, on Monday, 24 June, a new humanitarian medical aid operation for the Palestinian population in Gaza. The Moroccan aid was delivered via the same unprecedented land route used for the food aid operation deployed under the instruction of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, last Ramadan. Those large-scale humanitarian operations deployed for the benefit of the Palestinian population confirm the effective and unwavering commitment of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, to the Palestinian cause.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco condemns in the strongest terms all forms of violence against children, in particular their recruitment and exploitation by separatist armed groups as child soldiers, especially in refugee camps. Morocco was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It also endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration.

Morocco will do all it can to support the efforts of the international community to protect children in all regions of the world from the theft of their childhood and their fundamental rights, and to put an end to crimes committed against children in armed conflict. These are war crimes and crimes against humanity because those children are the future of our nations.

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

**Mr. Thapa** (Nepal): At the outset, let me thank the presidency of the Republic of Korea for organizing this very important debate. I highly appreciate the briefers' comprehensive and valuable insights.

In conflicts, children are the most vulnerable and suffer the gravest consequences. The Secretary-General's report (S/2024/384) presents an alarming level of violence inflicted on children. To our great consternation, the number of grave violations, including the abduction, recruitment, killing and maiming of children, has reached a record high. Despite the Organization's consistent efforts and

several international normative frameworks, children continue to bear the brunt of conflicts. That must cease. Protecting children is a must; it is our common and primary responsibility.

On this, let me highlight a few points.

First, national governments have the primary responsibility to protect children. They must implement a robust legal framework in order to protect children and their rights. They must ensure more effective accountability measures for violence against children and bring perpetrators to justice.

Secondly, in a post-conflict setting, protecting the rights and interests of children and vulnerable groups should be prioritized, including in rehabilitation and reintegration processes and peacebuilding strategies. Investment in education, health systems and social support mechanisms is critical to reintegrate them into society.

Thirdly, conflicting parties should respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access must be ensured in order to protect civilians in conflict zones.

Fourthly, international assistance and support must be extended in order to enhance the capacity of the State to protect and strengthen legal and operational frameworks so as to promote accountability.

Fifthly, Nepal recognizes the continued attention of the United Nations and the Security Council to this agenda item. The tools available to the Security Council, such as the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, the listing in the annex of the Secretary-General report and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should work impartially and independently.

Sixthly, diplomatic efforts and other measures must be employed strategically so as to deter the use of child soldiers and other abuses. Similarly, full-fledged preventive actions should be in place in order to prevent conflict, and we must address the root causes of conflicts elsewhere in the world in our efforts to protect children.

Nepal's own experience of the peace process includes the rehabilitation and reintegration of conflict-affected children. Nepal incorporated child protection provisions from the early stages of the peace process, with time-bound and tailor-made action plans. After

the transparent implementation of said action plans, Nepal was delisted from the annex in the Secretary-General's reports.

As the largest troop- and police-contributing country, Nepal implements a protection mandate in its peacekeeping operations and supports the capacity-building of host agencies. To prevent relapse after a mission's withdrawal, the Council needs to prioritize protection in the transition plan, provide training and resources to local authorities and establish mechanisms for regular reporting and accountability.

In conclusion, protecting children in armed conflict is not just a moral imperative, it is a reflection of humanity. It requires unwavering commitment and coordinated actions. Let us stand united in our resolve to protect them, ensure that their rights are upheld and provide them with the support they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

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

**Mr. De Martin Topranin (Italy):** I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for organizing this annual open debate, and I thank the former Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Deputy Executive Director of Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations of UNICEF for their briefings.

Italy aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children, regardless of legal status, should have the right to a safe and peaceful childhood. We are deeply concerned about the significant rise in verified grave violations highlighted in the Secretary-General's 2023 report (S/2023/384), noting a shocking 21 per cent increase from 2022. This alarming trend is aggravated by factors such as the denial of humanitarian access and attacks on schools and hospitals. International law mandates that State and non-State armed groups must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in need, including children. Schools and hospitals are crucial, providing children with psychological support and social protection, and attacks on these institutions are among the six grave violations against children in



conflict, severely impacting their immediate and long-term health.

The intersection of armed conflicts with crises like climate change further increases children's vulnerability, emphasizing the need to protect those in emergency situations. Forced displacement heightens the risk of recruitment, abduction, trafficking, sexual exploitation and harmful practices, including early and forced marriage.

To stop the cycle of violations against children, a systematic and coherent approach is necessary: from prevention to accountability to reintegration. In that context, Italy emphasizes the importance of the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, highlighting the need to integrate those principles into the broader peacekeeping agenda. Our actions should aim to provide a child-rights-based response, prioritizing the best interests of children in all aspects of their lives and treating children formerly recruited by armed groups as victims.

We also emphasize the important role of the Safe Schools Declaration in reducing the impact of armed conflicts on education, students, educational personnel and infrastructure by urging all parties to refrain from the military use of civilian infrastructure.

In parallel, we must address under-reported crimes like sexual violence in conflict and rape used as a tactic of war. We encourage collaboration across different United Nations mandates to end this plague and its severe consequences on boys and girls and to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Let us take this occasion to reaffirm our strong support for the children and armed conflict mandate as a unique tool to prioritize child protection on the Council's political agenda.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Mr. Mukongo** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the Republic of Korea's Security Council presidency for the month of June and commends you, Mr. President, for including such an important issue — children and armed conflict — on the agenda. My delegation also wishes to welcome Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter,

Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the representative of UNICEF to today's meeting.

My country is at war. That means that children are continuously exposed to abuse of all types, as the Council heard yesterday morning and as noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/384).

In that regard, two observations can be made: Children are civilians whose rights are the most seriously violated. Even worse, they experience great trauma. That affects their psychological makeup, which has not yet fully developed, when they are recruited as child soldiers. That is particularly the case when they are told to kill an opponent in cold blood, or a fellow child soldier who has been accused of being a collaborator or forced to set fire to villages. All armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo recruit boys and girls and use them during fighting as combatants, messengers, spies and traffickers and to transport ammunition.

With regard to the aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo from Rwanda at the moment, we should recall that the very first sanctions imposed against Rwanda by the United States Department of State, in September 2023 for its support for the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23), were in response to the group's unacceptable practice of using child soldiers. Nonetheless, I am sure members will also recall that, on Friday, 3 May this year, the Rwandan army and its M23 proxies, as part of their policy of extermination and while demonstrating complete disdain for international humanitarian law, deliberately bombed the displaced persons camp in Mugunga, west of the city of Goma, killing 35 people and injuring 37 others, most of whom were children.

This bleak picture shows the overall situation of children in the conflict that is tearing my country apart. In that regard, the Secretary-General's report reveals an increase of 41 per cent in the number of verified serious violations against children during the first quarter of 2023, as compared to the same period the previous year. There were 3,377 serious violations against 2,420 children in 2022, according to the June 2023 report on children and armed conflict.

In Rutshuru and Masisi territory, in North Kivu, occupied by the M23 and the Rwanda Defence Force, children are constantly subject to forced labour to extract natural resources. Those children are also used to break stones in mines. Once the stones have

been broken up, the coltan they contain is used for electronic devices. The high level of radioactivity in those substances explains the high degree of respiratory problems, sometimes deadly, from which many Congolese children suffer after having handled or transported coltan. For those who survive, they are traumatized by the acts of banditry and the barbarity perpetrated against them by armed groups. They often experience scenes of violence during which their families and friends are killed before their eyes.

Thousands of child victims of violent attacks by armed groups have suffered significant emotional and physical harm. I take this opportunity to speak on behalf of those children, whose families, often living in catastrophic economic situations, require tangible steps to provide them with reparations. In terms of education, children displaced during fighting essentially have no access to education, which makes them more vulnerable to being recruited by armed groups.

For its part, the Government has responded to this situation by progressively seeking to ensure respect for the almost sacred provisions of international humanitarian law in this area. In 2012, the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a plan of action with the United Nations to put an end to recruitment of children into the Congolese security and armed forces. In 2015, the Democratic Republic of the Congo adopted a road map to speed up the implementation of its plan of action. Since then, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) has fully implemented the action plan. Finally, after having recognized in 2017 that the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo had adhered to the provisions of the plan of action, the United Nations removed the FARDC from its list of State armed forces that recruit or use child soldiers.

I cannot conclude without commending the work of all agencies working to protect children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My delegation would like to thank United Nations Volunteers for its work on behalf of children's health, as well as Save the Children for its efforts to support children in armed conflict, and especially those who briefed this meeting to shed light on the difficult situation facing many children. We call on Member States, donors and United Nations agencies to increase their support for child protection organizations so that local capacity can be bolstered and so that all children are protected. In conclusion, we would call upon the members of the

Council to reiterate their firm condemnation of all armed groups that use children in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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

**Ms. Lortkipanidze (Georgia):** At the outset, let me thank the presidency of the Republic of Korea for convening this important debate.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of European Union. I would like to some make additional comments in my national capacity.

It has been 25 years since the adoption of the landmark resolution 1261 (1999), on children and armed conflict. Despite the fact that the issue of children affected by armed conflict has been systematically included on the agenda of the Council, we continue to see an increase in grave violations against children in numerous situations around the world. We are deeply alarmed with the high number of violations verified last year, as reflected in the latest report (S/2024/384) of the Secretary-General. We reiterate our support for the children and armed conflict mandate and underline that upholding our commitments under international law and redoubling national and international efforts are key for effectively addressing grave violations committed against children.

Protecting education during armed conflict is critical for building the foundation for long-term social cohesion and development. In that context, let me reiterate the importance of the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles, of which Georgia is both party and a strong supporter.

For the third year now, as a result of Russia's war of aggression, children in Ukraine have to endure unprecedented violence, including forced deportation, which amounts to war crimes. We fully share the concerns set out in the report regarding violence against children and continued attacks on schools and hospitals. In that regard, let me reiterate our call on Russia to comply with the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice 16 March 2022.

Regrettably, Russia's acts of aggression and the consequences of its occupation are well-known to Georgia. I would like to bring to the Council's attention the dire humanitarian and human rights situation in the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of

Georgia, where the fundamental rights of conflict-affected children continue to be violated by the Russian Federation, the Power exercising effective control on the ground. Let me also recall the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of January 2021, which legally attested to Russia's occupation and effective control over both Georgian regions.

Conflict-affected children are subject to various human rights abuses, including, but not limited to, restrictions on the freedom of movement and access to health care and the prohibition of education in the native Georgian language. That once again clearly demonstrates the urgent need for access for international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms to both Russia-occupied regions of Georgia. We call on the international community to urge Russia to cease its provocative and destructive actions in the illegally occupied regions of Georgia and start fulfilling its international obligations, first and foremost the European Union-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008.

In conclusion, let me stress the critical significance of the consistent and firm stance of the international community for safeguarding children's rights everywhere, including in conflict-affected areas.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the Deputy Permanent Observer of the Holy See.

**Monsieur Murphy (Holy See):** As we observe an alarming increase in conflicts around the globe, the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1261 (1999) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions provide a propitious occasion to underscore the disproportionate and catastrophic impact of conflict on children. The latest report (S/2024/384) of the Secretary-General reveals a disturbing trend: the percentage of children killed in armed conflict has tripled since 2022. The world is currently witnessing the desperate situation of children living in populated areas affected by conflict, where the use of explosive weapons has a particularly devastating impact. It is of great concern to my delegation that lethal weapons are increasingly being used against schools, hospitals and places of worship. Those locations, which should be safe havens, especially for children, are instead becoming sites of devastation and death.

It is imperative that the impact of these atrocities on children not be understated. In addition to causing severe physical injuries, explosive weapons, land

mines and other remnants of war inflict profound psychological and emotional trauma. Furthermore, the proliferation of the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons contributes significantly to violations against children, including their recruitment as child soldiers, which remains one of the highest verified violations against children.

We are witnessing annually thousands of children being deprived of their childhoods. We are allowing them to be robbed of their dignity, which they receive as a loving gift from God and which we have the fundamental duty to preserve and guarantee. In the light of the necessity to safeguard young lives, my delegation would like to put forward the following three points for the Council's consideration.

First, access to humanitarian assistance is crucial for the protection of children. The Holy See condemns any attempt to obstruct the delivery of supplies, including food, water and medicine, to those suffering from the impacts of war, especially children. It is evident that any such obstructions not only violate international humanitarian law, but also have a detrimental impact on the development of children.

Secondly, the cessation of the production, stockpiling and use of indiscriminate weapons, especially in populated areas, is an essential component to limiting the impact of armed conflict on children. For that reason, my delegation commends the United Nations Mine Action Service for its valuable work and calls for the full implementation of the political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Thirdly, we urge the Council to guarantee the optimal utilization of all available means and tools to facilitate the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda. It is regrettable that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has been unable to adopt conclusions on several country reports for a period exceeding two years. That failure has concrete consequences for children in some of the most vulnerable situations.

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

**Ms. Ahangari (Azerbaijan):** We would like to thank the Republic of Korea for convening today's open debate on this very important topic. We also thank

the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, for her briefing.

For yet another year, we have studied the report (S/2024/384) of the Secretary-General and its gloomy picture of the world of children being targeted by grave violations, including killing, maiming, abduction and recruitment for military purposes. At this critical juncture, ensuring full compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as providing accountability for past violations, remains an ongoing imperative along the path towards effective prevention and protection for children in armed conflict.

The children of Azerbaijan suffered immensely from the Armenian occupation of our territories in the past 30 years. The occupation claimed the lives of hundreds of Azerbaijani children, while around 305,000 lost either one or both of their parents. In contravention of international humanitarian law, 92 children were taken hostage by Armenia, and hundreds of thousands were displaced along with their families. Almost 1,000 secondary schools and preschools were destroyed or substantially damaged. Another act of aggression committed by Armenia, during the fall of 2020, included using missile strikes on residential areas in the cities of Ganja and Barda of Azerbaijan, resulting in the killing of 12 children and the injuring of 16. The youngest victim was only 18 months old.

Even after the liberation of our territories, children continue to be subjected to suffering, as Armenia refuses to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines it laid in our territories. Since the fall of 2020, 363 citizens of Azerbaijan, including 10 children and youths, became victims of landmines. Furthermore, around 4,000 citizens, including 71 children of Azerbaijan, are still missing in connection with the conflict — whose fate Armenia consistently refrains from clarifying.

While Armenia continues its widespread practice of the recruitment of children by the armed forces and exploits them for hate propaganda against Azerbaijan, my country has embarked upon a full-scale restoration and rehabilitation process in the liberated territories. By restoring civilian objects and rebuilding educational facilities, including the establishment of Karabakh University in the city of Khankendi, Azerbaijan is determined to create an opportunity for children

to live and prosper in a peaceful, sustainable and flourishing region.

**The President:** The representative of Saudi Arabia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

**Mr. Almadhi** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to deliver this statement in my national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Mr. Ted Chaiban, Deputy Executive Director of Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations of UNICEF; and Mr. Ban Ki-moon, former United Nations Secretary-General, for their valuable briefings and their tireless and exceptional efforts for the protection of civilians and children during armed conflict.

This meeting coincides with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the signing of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999), which are undoubtedly landmarks in international humanitarian law and clearly reflect the will and the concerted efforts of the international community and its determination to protect civilians and their basic rights during armed conflict throughout the world.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that almost a century has passed since the adoption of the basic legal provisions on the protection of civilians, we continue to see repeated violations perpetrated against children in conflict regions. All of us have seen the most recent annual report (S/2024/384) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and the shocking information it contains on the increased violations of international humanitarian law in areas of conflict.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomes the Secretary-General's recent report, which lists the Israeli armed forces and security forces on the list of actors that have perpetrated grave violations against children in conflict situations. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia values international reports that document what the Palestinian people are being subjected to, and we underscore the need for the international community to uphold its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and to guarantee the implementation of international resolutions aimed at ending the suffering of our brotherly Palestinian people.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also commends the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her positive engagement with the requests of the Group of Arab States conveyed on 9 April, which included a request for blacklisting the Israeli army owing to its heinous crimes that have led to the killing of 15,000 Palestinian children.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its call upon the Council to adopt a draft resolution under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to ensure that Israel, the occupying Power, adheres to a ceasefire, guarantees the delivery of humanitarian aid, stops its brutal aggression against the Palestinian people and provides protection for them. We also stress the need to make Israel abide by the relevant Security Council resolutions, international humanitarian law and the two orders issued recently by the International Court of Justice in the case of genocide that Israel is perpetrating against the Palestinian people. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will continue to take action at all levels and in all international forums to help establish peace and security in the region.

**The President:** The representative of Pakistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

**Mrs. Ijaz (Pakistan):** I am constrained to take the floor on account of the remarks delivered by the representative of India in their statement. As always, the Indian representative evaded confronting the facts presented by my delegation, opting instead to recycle and present worn-out and fabricated assertions before the Council. Their reluctance to engage with the truth should be a source of embarrassment.

While accusing others, that delegation neglects its own abysmal track record of grave violations against children in Kashmir and crucial recommendations provided by the last year's report (S/2023/363) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict on protecting children in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir, including ending the use of force and pellet guns, minimizing detention and preventing abuse. Indian People's Tribunal — and Indian

non-governmental organization — describes very aptly the plight of Kashmiri children:

“The entire concept of childhood has undergone a radical change in the Kashmir Valley. The children do not go to kindergarten or learn nursery rhymes or play with toys. Instead, their memories of childhood consist of an atmosphere surcharged with fear, terror, constant violence, unrest and insecurity.”

Children have been killed and subjected to violence in Pakistan in recent years, largely due to terrorist attacks, while Indian occupying forces have been responsible for grave violations against children in occupied Kashmir. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) have been behind the terrorist attacks against children in Pakistan, including the cowardly and gut-wrenching terrorist attack against the Army Public School in 2014, which claimed the lives of more than 130 innocent children. We have shared concrete evidence that the TTP and the BLA have been financed and sponsored by Indian agencies. The Indian captured by an intelligence officer commander — Kulbhushan Jadhav — has confessed to India's support to such terrorist and subversive activities.

The Indian delegation persists in their delusion by claiming Kashmir is a part of India, stubbornly holding on to that legal fiction. The reality is clear: Kashmir remains a disputed territory, as recognized by the Security Council resolutions calling for a free and fair plebiscite under United Nations auspices to determine its future. Indian occupation forces' draconian measures to suppress protests and demands for fundamental freedoms in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir are well documented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other human rights organizations. India continues to deny fundamental rights to the Kashmiris, particularly the right to self-determination, in clear violation of Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations and numerous Security Council resolutions.

Indian State terrorism in occupied Kashmir will not be able to dampen the spirit of those seeking their legitimate right to self-determination.

*The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.*