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Children and armed conflict in South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, is the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in South Sudan and covers the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024.

The report documents the effects of cycles of violence on children in the country, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations committed against children and contains information, where available, on perpetrators. The progress made by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity of South Sudan to strengthen the framework to respond to, end and prevent grave violations against children, including through prevention strategies, is also outlined.

The report contains recommendations addressed to all parties that are aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in South Sudan.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, covers the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024. It is the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in South Sudan to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report highlights trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in South Sudan and provides details of the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2023/99](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in South Sudan ([S/AC.51/2023/1](#)). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the dialogue with parties to the conflict. Where possible, violations are attributed to parties to the conflict. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/79/878-S/2025/247](#)), the South Sudan People's Defence Forces remained listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and the abduction of children. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition – pro-Machar (SPLM/A-IO) remained listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and the abduction of children.

2. The information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in South Sudan, which is co-chaired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Insecurity and restricted access to some conflict-affected areas, often linked to flooding or poor infrastructure, hampered the documentation and verification of grave violations against children in some parts of the country. For instance, parts of Central Equatoria State with National Salvation Front (NAS) presence were inaccessible due to insecurity during the reporting period. Moreover, parts of Unity, Jonglei and Upper Nile were inaccessible at certain times of the year due to flooding. Therefore, the information contained in the report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in South Sudan during the reporting period, and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher. Information relating to incidents committed earlier but verified only during the reporting period is qualified as verified at a later date.

II. Overview of the political, military and security situation

3. During the reporting period, South Sudan's political landscape remained fragile, with limited progress in implementing the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. The ceasefire in South Sudan largely held until June 2024. The country has seen a substantial reduction in political violence since 2018, with low intensity clashes between armed forces and armed groups continuing in some parts of the country. Violence at the local level, including cattle-related incidents, persisted across the country, especially in Upper Nile, Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Warrap and the adjacent areas to Abyei, and greater Equatoria, particularly Western Equatoria. Displacement, abduction, recruitment and use, killing and maiming, as well as rape and other forms of sexual violence against children were verified during these clashes.

4. Episodic clashes between government security forces and non-signatories of the Revitalized Agreement continued to threaten the progress of the peace process in areas where the non-signatory groups have an active presence and resulted in grave violations against children. Of particular concern were violations committed by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, including killing, maiming and sexual

violence against children, often in response to alleged associations or collaborations between the children or their families and NAS.

5. Similarly, the response of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces to attacks by community-based militias and/or alleged civil defence groups resulted in grave violations against children. Their response to intercommunal violence in Warrap State between June and December 2022 resulted in the killing of children, sexual violence and the burning down of homes. In Jonglei, the killing in September 2023 of a former commander of the People's Defence Forces in Pochalla exacerbated tensions in the area, leading to fighting between armed youths and the People's Defence Forces between October and December 2023. These clashes resulted in the killing of children, the displacement of about 12,000 persons and the relocation of humanitarian staff.

6. In the greater Upper Nile region, fighting within the Kit-Gwang forces, which had split from SPLM/A-IO, resulted in hostilities that eventually involved the SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces, SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces, SPLM/A-IO and the South Sudan People's Defence Forces. Those hostilities led to mass displacements and grave violations against children, including sexual violence, killing and maiming, and abduction. In addition, increased tensions between SPLM/A-IO and the People's Defence Forces continued to be observed in Unity State following the defection of two senior military officers in October 2023. The presence of one of the defectors in Unity State and the movement of his forces in the State increased tensions and further displaced communities from Leer, Guit, Mayom and Rubkona Counties. Abduction, recruitment and use, and sexual violence were verified during that conflict.

7. In Western Equatoria, the presence of NAS elements in the greater Mundri area, cattle herders, unidentified armed groups, SPLM/A-IO, forces loyal to Brigadier General James Nando and the Necessary Unified Forces resulted in the deterioration of the protective environment for children. In June 2023, reports of the recruitment and use of children by forces loyal to Brigadier General James Nando started to surface and were later verified. In addition, reports of the increased abduction and recruitment of children by SPLM/A-IO were verified. As a result of increased insecurity in the region, the Necessary Unified Forces were deployed to provide additional protection. However, verified violations were attributed to the Necessary Unified Forces, including the recruitment and use of children and the perpetration of sexual violence, as well as the military use of schools and hospitals. From March 2024 onwards, the abduction and recruitment and use of children primarily attributed to unidentified armed groups were verified in Western Equatoria.

8. The continued reshuffling of senior government officials by the President, Salva Kiir, has contributed to instability, undermined the peace process and stalled progress in the implementation of key measures that are crucial to child protection efforts. For instance, there were significant delays in the unification of forces process, leaving children vulnerable to grave violations. At the end of the reporting period, approximately 7 per cent of the projected 83,000 members of the Necessary Unified Forces had been deployed to several parts of the country, according to the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism. Challenges to the full deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces remained, including the distribution of salaries and equipment, and their operationalization under a single unified command. While the Necessary Unified Forces are critical in providing security to enhance the protective environment for children, that is contingent upon the deployment of properly trained and equipped unified forces. The deployment of underresourced Necessary Unified Forces most likely contributed to, for instance, the military use of six schools and one hospital in Western Equatoria by the Necessary Unified Forces.

9. In April 2024, the President commenced the formal integration of Lieutenant General Johnson Olony of the SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces and his top officers into the South Sudan People's Defence Forces in implementation of the Khartoum Peace Agreement of January 2022. That development had the potential to reduce violence and, thus, increase protection for children in the greater Upper Nile region, whereas the SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces had previously contributed to instability in the region. The absence of verified grave violations against children perpetrated by SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces since their integration into the People's Defence Forces suggests that there has been an improvement in the protection of children from grave violations.

10. The Tumaini Initiative, a high-level mediation for the conflict in South Sudan aimed at bringing holdout opposition groups into the peace agreement, was launched in Nairobi on 9 May 2024. This initiative, which brings together the government and opposition groups and led to a declaration committing to mediation, renouncing violence and supporting a democratic transition, was aimed at renewing opportunities for peaceful conflict resolution and improved protection for children.

11. As at 30 November 2024, according to UNICEF, the conflict in the Sudan had led to over 887,991 returnees and refugees, including 446,367 children, entering South Sudan, straining resources in border states and the overall humanitarian situation. Two-thirds of the population of South Sudan faced acute food insecurity, which was worsened by climate shocks, economic crises and reduced international aid. Flooding and disruptions to the flow of oil threatened to further undermine the economic situation, deeply affecting the safety and well-being of children and increasing their vulnerability to grave violations.

III. Grave violations against children

12. The country task force verified 630 violations affecting 469 children (328 boys, 132 girls, 9 sex unknown), an increase from the previous reporting period, when 457 grave violations were verified. A total of 42 children (21 boys, 21 girls) suffered multiple violations: abduction for recruitment and use (25), sexual violence during abduction (13) and killing (1) and maiming (2) following abduction. One girl was subjected to sexual violence and use during abduction.

13. A total of 41 violations that occurred before the reporting period were verified, including 27 attacks on schools, sexual violence affecting 13 girls and the recruitment and use of one boy.

14. Non-State actors were responsible for 45 per cent of total violations (283), which were perpetrated by SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces (115), SPLM/A-IO (87), NAS (38), forces loyal to Brigadier General James Nando (20), SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (10), the Necessary Unified Forces (7), the South Sudan People's Movement/Army (SSPM/A) (2), the South Sudan United Front/Army (SSUF/A) (2) and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) (2). Of the total number of violations, 31 per cent were attributed to government security forces (194), including the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (174), the South Sudan National Police Service (11), South Sudan National Wildlife Services (6), the Civil Defence Service (2) and South Sudan Prison Service (1). A total of 153 violations (24 per cent) were unattributed, including violations that resulted from crossfire (53) between SPLM/A-IO and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (28), the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and unidentified armed groups (23) and SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (2), and violations caused by explosive remnants of war (52).

15. Some 63 per cent of the verified violations occurred in Western Equatoria (141), Upper Nile (137) and Jonglei (120). Other violations occurred in Unity (91), Central

Equatoria (59), Western Bahr el-Ghazal (21), Eastern Equatoria (19), Northern Bahr el-Ghazal (17), Warrap (15) and Lakes (10).

16. The recruitment and use (248), abduction (130) and killing and maiming (86) of children were the three predominant verified grave violations, accounting for 74 per cent of the total verified grave violations. There was a significant reduction in the verified cases of sexual violence, from 81 to 47 cases. The actual number of violations is likely to be higher, however, as such violence continued to be underreported owing to stigma, the fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, the absence of, or lack of access to, services, impunity and safety concerns. Similarly, killing and maiming decreased from 117 to 85 cases compared with the previous reporting period. In contrast, abductions more than doubled while attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access for children surged during the reporting period, compared with the previous report.

A. Recruitment and use of children

17. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 249 children (227 boys, 22 girls) between the ages of 13 and 17. Violations were attributed to government security forces (108), including the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (97), South Sudan National Wildlife Services (6), Civil Defence Service (2), the South Sudan National Police Service (2) and South Sudan Prison Service (1). Non-State actors accounted for 141 violations, including SPLM/A-IO (60), unidentified armed groups (28), SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces (26), forces loyal to Brigadier General James Nando (19), the Necessary Unified Forces (5), SSOA (2) and NAS (1).

18. In the second half of 2022, 49 boys were recruited and used. In 2023, that number increased to 152 children (136 boys, 16 girls). In the first half of 2024, 48 children (42 boys, 6 girls) were verified as recruited and used. More cases of recruitment and use were verified between July 2023 and June 2024 than in the period from July 2022 to June 2023. The increase can be attributed to increased tensions and insecurity in Western Equatoria following the indefinite suspension of the local peace process. In addition, several armed groups, allegedly allied with the main parties to the conflict and formed along ethnic and tribal lines, began to emerge, which led to an increase in the recruitment of children into their ranks.

19. A total of 84 children (78 boys, 6 girls) were separated from armed forces and groups in 2022 (3), 2023 (49) and 2024 (32). Six boys were released during formal demobilization, disarmament and reintegration processes, 69 children (65 boys, 4 girls) were released following advocacy by the country task force and child protection partners, and 9 children (7 boys, 2 girls) escaped. The status of the other 165 children remains unknown at the time of writing.

20. There was an increase in violations attributed to government security forces, from 65 during the previous reporting period to 108 during the current reporting period. Nevertheless, a greater number of violations of recruitment and use were attributed to non-State actors during the current reporting period.

21. Commanders of SPLM/A-IO also targeted children for recruitment in apparent preparation for hostilities in the Western Equatoria region. At the same time, Brigadier General James Nando began his recruitment campaign targeting children in the region, reportedly due to the need to bolster his ranks in response to a call for training and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces ahead of scheduled elections.

22. Violations were perpetrated in Western Equatoria, (120) accounting for 48 per cent of the total, followed by Jonglei (37), Upper Nile (32), Unity (31), Northern

Bahr el-Ghazal (13), Lakes (7), Central Equatoria (3), Warrap (3) and Western Bahr el-Ghazal (2).

23. Children were used in support roles, such as bodyguards, cooks, for guarding checkpoints and patrols, and by commanders, for sexual purposes. For example, the country task force verified the recruitment and use of 13 children (12 boys, 1 girl) between the ages of 14 and 17 by forces under the command of Brigadier General James Nando in Western Equatoria State. The children were used as cooks and bodyguards for James Nando and his officers. The girl was forced to live with one of the soldiers at the barracks as a “wife”. In another instance, the country task force verified the recruitment and use of 5 boys, aged 16, by SPLM/A-IO in Western Equatoria on 10 August 2023. They were taken to the barracks to commence military training on 28 August 2023.

24. Aside from the majority of the violations reported in Western Equatoria, trends show that parties recruited intermittently, opportunistically targeting children. Many children were recruited through abduction. Others were coerced with promises of financial compensation or joined armed forces and groups owing to economic hardship. For example, on 19 November 2023, two boys aged 16 and 17, who were on their way home from church in Western Equatoria State, encountered a group of SPLM/A-IO elements who deceptively registered their names, with promises to pay them, and then forcefully took them to the SPLM/A-IO base, where they were recruited and used as escorts to the commander. On 18 December 2023, following persistent advocacy by the country task force, the children were released and reunited with their families.

25. While fewer girls than boys were recruited and used, girls were primarily used as cooks, to carry looted items and for sexual purposes. Boys were mostly used for operating checkpoints and as guards for patrols or as bodyguards. There were also cases in which boys were undergoing military training, without specificity as to their roles.

Deprivation of liberty of children for alleged association with armed groups/national security

26. A total of 16 boys between the ages of 15 and 17 were detained by the South Sudan National Police Service in Maridi, Western Equatoria. Recruited by an unidentified armed group on 19 May 2024, they were arrested by the police, along with their recruiters, after a parent reported their detention. The boys were convicted by a traditional court of not reporting their recruitment to their parents and sentenced to a fine or three months in prison. They were released on 25 June 2024 following advocacy by the country task force and child protection partners.

B. Killing and maiming

27. The country task force verified the killing (48) and maiming (37) of 85 children (57 boys, 25 girls, 3 sex unknown) some as young as 2 days old and up to the age of 17. Violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (59), including 51 resulting from explosive remnants of war, 4 by unknown armed groups and 4 during crossfire between the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces and unidentified perpetrators (2) and SPLM/A-IO and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (2). Other violations were attributed to SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces (11), People’s Defence Forces (10), SSPM/A (2), SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (1), NAS (1) and SPLM/A-IO (1). A total of 24 child casualties were verified in the second half of 2022, 51 in 2023 and 10 in the first half of 2024. Violations were perpetrated in Upper Nile (21), Western Bahr

el-Ghazal (16), Jonglei (14), Eastern Equatoria (13), Unity (8), Central Equatoria (5), Warrap (4), Northern Bahr el-Ghazal (3) and Lakes (1).

28. Among those violations, 59 per cent resulted from explosive remnants of war. Violations resulting from explosive devices tend to affect children in greater numbers as they are more prone to exploring risky areas and playing with these dangerous materials in groups. On 16 March 2023, 8 children (3 boys; 5 girls) between the ages of 13 and 17 were killed and 2 children (1 boy; 1 girl), 11 months of age and 11 years old, were maimed by explosive remnants of war in Western Bahr el-Ghazal. The incident occurred when one of the children picked up the object to show it to the other children and the device exploded.

29. Violations attributed to SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces occurred during the conflict in the greater Upper Nile from August to December 2022, during which SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces committed extremely violent attacks on the civilian population, especially children. For example, three boys between the ages of 2 and 6 were killed by SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces in Fashoda County, Upper Nile State, on 30 November 2022. The boys were shot and killed while hiding in the bush following an attack on their village.

30. Violations attributed to the South Sudan People's Defence Forces often occurred during military offensives against armed groups, including NAS and community-based-militias and/or self-described civil defence groups. Of concern, some violations perpetrated against children were allegedly perpetrated as a form of punishment for civilians rumoured to be NAS collaborators. The country task force verified the killing of a 12-year-old boy and 16-year-old girl by the People's Defence Forces in Yei River County, Central Equatoria State. The incident occurred when soldiers of the People's Defence Forces patrolling the village entered the victims' house and took their father, who was suspected of being a NAS collaborator, and the two children some distance from their house and shot them.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

31. The country task force verified the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against 47 girls between the ages of 7 and 17, attributed to the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (23), SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces (9), SPLM/A-IO (6), SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (2), the South Sudan National Police Service (2), the Necessary Unified Forces (2), forces loyal to Brigadier General James Nando (1) and unidentified perpetrators (2). Violations occurred in Central Equatoria (14), Upper Nile (8), Warrap (8), Unity (6), Jonglei (5), Western Equatoria (3), Lakes (2) and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal (1).

32. Of that total, 15 girls suffered multiple violations; 14 of the girls suffered sexual violence following their abduction. One of the girls was raped during association with one party to the conflict while another girl was abducted and raped during association with another party.

33. Among the sexual violence violations, 82 per cent occurred in 2022 and a third of these occurred in the context of the conflict in the greater Upper Nile of August to December 2022, during which civilians, including children, suffered acts of extreme violence. For example, two girls aged 17 were raped by SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces on 28 August 2022 in Jonglei State. The girls were abducted during a military attack on their village and raped by four soldiers for three days. The girls were released on 30 September 2022.

34. Many of the violations committed by the government security forces were opportunistic attacks on girls on their way to or from home or while they were

performing domestic chores, which further demonstrates how the persistent lack of accountability enables and perpetuates such violations. Often, these violations occurred in the context of forces deployed to an area in response to heightened insecurity. For example, on 1 September 2022, personnel of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces who were deployed to suppress the reported communal violence in Warrap State raped four girls at gunpoint. The girls received medical treatment and the perpetrators remain at large. In another incident, a 14-year-old girl was raped by an officer of the People's Defence Forces in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, on 19 November 2022. The girl was waylaid by two soldiers on her way to a playing field, dragged into a church and raped by one of the soldiers. The survivor received medical attention at a nearby health facility, and the perpetrator appeared before the High Court, where he was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and ordered to pay damages.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

35. A total of 87 attacks on schools (72) and on hospitals (15) was verified during the reporting period.

36. The 72 verified attacks against schools were attributed to the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (27) and unidentified perpetrators (38), resulting from crossfire between SPLM/A-IO and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (23) and between the People's Defence Forces and unidentified perpetrators (15). Other violations were attributed to SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces (3), SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (2), SPLM/A-IO (1) and unidentified perpetrators (1). All verified attacks against schools occurred in 2022. In April 2022, armed youths affiliated with the People's Defence Forces in Unity State attacked several villages, during which the looting and destruction of 27 primary schools was verified.

37. The majority of the incidents occurred in the context of the hostilities in greater Upper Nile: Jonglei (40), Unity (29) and Upper Nile (2). One violation occurred in Eastern Equatoria. For example, 13 primary schools, 1 secondary school and 2 medical facilities were destroyed during crossfire between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and unidentified perpetrators on 27 December 2022 in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Jonglei.

38. A total of 15 attacks on hospitals were verified and attributed to NAS (8) and unidentified perpetrators (7), including as a result of crossfire (5) between SPLM/A-IO and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (2), the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and unidentified perpetrators (2), and SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (1). All the verified incidents of attacks against hospitals occurred in 2022.

39. The incidents took place in Central Equatoria (8), Jonglei (5) and Eastern Equatoria (2). For example, a primary healthcare centre was attacked by NAS elements in Central Equatoria State on 16 October 2022. During the attack, NAS elements abducted five health workers, whose whereabouts remain unknown. This was the second incident targeting the same facility following an earlier attack in August 2022.

Military use of schools and hospitals

40. A total of 24 incidents of the military use of schools (20) and hospitals (4) were verified, 12 facilities (10 schools, 2 hospitals) in 2022, 9 facilities (7 schools, 2 hospitals) in 2023, and 3 schools in 2024. Government security forces were responsible for the military use of 19 facilities (15 schools, 4 hospitals), including the

South Sudan People's Defence Forces (8 schools, 2 hospitals), the South Sudan National Police Service (1 school, 1 hospital) and the Necessary Unified Forces (6 schools, 1 hospital). Armed groups were responsible for the military use of 5 schools, SPLM/A-IO (3 schools) and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (2 schools).

41. Most of the facilities were used as accommodation for soldiers (12). Four schools were used as ammunition storage facilities, and 3 schools were used as a military base for training. Some facilities were used for more than one purpose. For instance, a primary school in Western Equatoria State has been used by the Necessary Unified Forces since November 2022 for accommodation and weapons storage by the soldiers while the pupils were relocated to church premises within the vicinity. The country task force also verified following its persistent advocacy, the vacation of schools (8) and hospitals (2) by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (4), the Necessary Unified Forces (3), SPLM/A-IO (2) and the South Sudan National Police Service (1) during the reporting period.

E. Abduction

42. The country task force verified the abduction of 130 children (64 boys, 59 girls, 7 sex unknown) some as young as 2 days old and up to the age of 17. Of the total, 88 per cent of the violations (114) were attributed to armed groups, including SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces (67), NAS (16), SPLM/A-IO (16), unidentified perpetrators (10), SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (3) and SSUF/A (2). The remaining 16 violations were attributed to the South Sudan People's Defence Forces. Abductions increased from 63 in the previous reporting period to 130 in the current reporting period; 67 per cent of the abductions verified during the reporting period occurred in 2022. By the end of the reporting period, 63 of the abducted children had been released; 1 child had been killed while in captivity, while the whereabouts of the 66 other children remained unknown.

43. Over half of the verified violations of abduction occurred in Upper Nile (67), primarily arising from the conflict in the greater Upper Nile region in late 2022. Other violations occurred in Unity (19), Western Equatoria (18), Central Equatoria (17), Jonglei (6), Western Bahr el-Ghazal (2) and Eastern Equatoria (1).

44. The abduction of children often occurred simultaneously with or was followed by other grave violations. For example, a total of 25 children were abducted for recruitment and use, 14 children were victims of sexual violence during abduction, one child was killed and two children were maimed following abduction. For example, on 7 March 2023, the country task force verified the rape, abduction and use of a 17-year-old girl by SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces in Upper Nile State. The girl was abducted by the perpetrators during a military attack on her village and taken to another state, where she was forced to live with one of the perpetrators as his "wife" until her eventual escape.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

45. A total of 32 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access were verified during the reporting period, with 31 incidents occurring in 2022 and 1 in 2023; no incidents were verified as having occurred in 2024. Incidents were attributed to NAS (12), the South Sudan National Police Service (7) and unidentified perpetrators (7), resulting from crossfires between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and unidentified perpetrators (4), between SPLM/A-IO and SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (1) and unidentified perpetrators (2). Other violations were perpetrated by SPLM/A-IO (3), SPLM/A-IO Agwelek forces (2) and the People's Defence Forces (1). Incidents

occurred in Jonglei (13), Central Equatoria (12), Upper Nile (4), Eastern Equatoria (2) and Western Bahr el-Ghazal (1).

46. Incidents involved threats, the ambushing of convoys, the looting of facilities, violence against humanitarian workers, including harassment, abduction, and the killing of 3 humanitarian workers. For example, on 18 November 2022, one staff member of a non-governmental organization (NGO) was shot dead at a nutrition site, another NGO staff member was abducted, and several nutrition supplies were looted during an attack on a village in Upper Nile State by SPLM/A-IO. The abducted staff member was later released. In another instance, on 27 December 2022, four nutrition centres in Jonglei were destroyed and looted during crossfire between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and unidentified perpetrators, which impeded the provision of nutrition treatment to children in the area.

IV. Progress in addressing grave violations against children

A. Legislative reform and combating impunity

47. Accountability for sexual violence, as with other grave violations, continued to be low, as perpetrators mostly remained at large. Nevertheless, some progress was made by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity of South Sudan in its attempts to promote accountability and combat impunity. For instance, UNMISS supported the deployment of mobile courts to Yei and Maridi, and to Upper Nile and Unity States, to promote accountability and combat impunity for human rights violations and abuses. In September 2022, a General Court Martial convicted and sentenced an individual to five years' imprisonment, ordered him to pay compensation and further ordered his dishonourable discharge from the armed forces for killing and maiming a child.

48. An officer of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and ordered to pay damages for the rape of a 14-year-old girl in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State on 19 November 2022. A General Court Martial verdict of June 2023 convicted and sentenced an officer of the People's Defence Forces to 12 years' imprisonment and ordered his dishonourable discharge from service, as well as the payment of compensation and damages for the rape of an 8-year-old girl. These cases signal some progress towards accountability for grave violations committed against children, with due regard to the limitations not only in the legal and judicial systems in South Sudan, but also the difficulty in obtaining formal records of accountability mechanisms, such as courts.

B. Dialogue with parties to the conflict

49. The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Juba in May 2022 to attend a national conference. She encouraged the authorities to swiftly implement the Comprehensive Action Plan to End and Prevent all Grave Violations against Children, adopted in 2020, and urged stakeholders to prevent grave violations against children. These engagements yielded positive developments during the reporting period.

50. On 5 and 6 September 2023, the country task force supported the second national conference on the protection of children in South Sudan, which was focused on accountability for sexual violence against children. Participants from parties to the conflict, government officials, civil society organizations and the international community in attendance generated 25 resolutions and recommendations around the

need to strengthen accountability for child rights violations, specifically sexual violence, and for the Government to fund the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan to demonstrate its commitment to the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

51. The Government signed an extension of the Comprehensive Action Plan for 18 months, from 16 April 2024 to 15 October 2025, thereby indicating its continued commitment and allowing ample time for parties to implement the pending provisions fully and effectively. In accordance with its oversight responsibilities under the Action Plan, the national-level technical committee prepared and published a progress report on the implementation of the Action Plan. In the report, the committee indicated that while some steps had been taken towards the enhanced protection of children, including the establishment of enforcement and accountability mechanisms against the perpetrators of grave violations, there was a need to ensure the dissemination of military orders or directives prohibiting all six grave violations to all members of the armed forces and relevant authorities, and to incorporate child rights and child protection into training curricula for the armed forces, among other pending provisions geared towards ending and preventing the six grave violations against children.

52. Cooperation from parties to the conflict with the country task force in conducting verification missions to identify and release children associated with armed forces and armed groups continued and resulted in the release of 6 boys from forces loyal to Brigadier General James Nando.

53. The country task force conducted dialogue and engagement with the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, SPLA/M-IO and SSOA to support them in fulfilling commitments under the Action Plan.

54. The country task force supported the national-level technical committee to conduct joint field missions to the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Western Equatoria State and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, between August and December 2023, in immediate response to increased reports of the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups. During these missions, the country task force engaged in dialogue with the parties to the conflict, which led to such additional outcomes as the issuance of directives related to vacating schools and hospitals, a recommitment to the provision of access to barracks for regular screening exercises and the appointment of child protection focal points by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and SPLA/M-IO.

55. High-level advocacy by the country task force on the issue of increasing reports of the recruitment and use of children in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal resulted in the Government's assignment of senior military personnel to conduct screening exercises in all barracks in the State, in November 2023. Those actions demonstrated the Government's commitment to addressing child protection concerns and raised the awareness of commanders around the criticality of these issues.

C. Release of children and programmatic response

56. Some 125 children (94 boys, 30 girls, 1 sex unknown) between the ages of 6 months and 17 years were released from captivity. Of those children, 84 (78 boys, 6 girls) between the ages of 14 and 17 were separated from armed forces and armed groups and 41 of the abducted children were released (36) or escaped (5) from captivity. The releases were often a direct result of sustained advocacy and engagement with these forces and groups by the country task force on monitoring and reporting.

57. In many cases, case management, psychosocial, reintegration and logistical support (in the form of shelter, transport, cash assistance) and other forms of support were provided by UNICEF implementing partners and partners specialized in gender-based violence services to survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence, children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, who had been released, and children affected by other grave violations.

58. The country task force, through UNMISS quick-impact projects, has renovated and built several classrooms to promote children's rights to education and as part of efforts to reduce and prevent children's exposure to grave violations, especially the recruitment and use of children. In addition, the country task force advocated and secured the vacating of 8 schools that were previously occupied by armed forces and groups.

59. In order to address the significant number of child-casualties linked to explosive remnants of war and landmines, the country task force enhanced its collaborative efforts with the Mine Action Service on explosive ordnance risk education, in collaboration with field teams, to improve the protective environment for children.

D. Advocacy and mainstreaming of child protection

60. Capacity-building and awareness-raising, targeted at a wide range of stakeholders, remained central to the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan and was consistently supported by the United Nations. During the reporting period, the country task force provided 110 child protection training sessions for 4,995 participants (3,915 men, 1,080 women), including 1,122 community members (404 women), 2,617 members of the government security forces (420 women), 680 government officials (500 men, 180 women), 409 SPLM/A-IO elements (369 men, 40 women), 107 Necessary Unified Forces elements (84 men, 23 women), 32 SSOA elements (31 men, 1 woman) and 28 protection partners (16 men, 12 women).

61. In addition, 364 awareness-raising sessions benefited 34,218 participants (21,641 men, 12,577 women), including 21,328 community members (12,314 men, 9,014 women), 9,193 members of the government security forces (6,731 men, 2,462 women), 1,390 Necessary Unified Forces elements (971 men, 419 women), 1,124 government officials (735 men, 389 women), 642 SPLM/A-IO elements (607 men, 35 women) and 541 protection partners (283 men, 258 women).

62. UNMISS conducted 89 sessions of induction and mainstreaming on child protection for 7,485 United Nations staff deployed to South Sudan (5,747 men, 1,738 women) including 4,400 military officers (3,687 men, 713 women), 2,472 police officers (1,706 men, 766 women); 578 civilian staff (335 men, 243 women) and 35 corrections officers (19 men, 16 women).

V. Observations and recommendations

63. I am concerned by the increase in the number of grave violations against children in South Sudan since my previous report, in particular the cases of recruitment and use, attacks against schools and hospitals, abduction and the denial of humanitarian access for children in the face of large-scale malnutrition. I condemn these grave violations and reiterate my call for all parties to put an end to and prevent them and uphold their responsibilities under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

64. I call upon the Government of South Sudan to enhance child protection efforts, and to all parties involved in the peace process to fully implement the Revitalized

Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, including its provisions relating to children, and to contribute to ensuring accountability for grave violations against children. I urge the Government to ensure that the rights and voices of children are integrated throughout any and all ongoing peace processes. I am particularly concerned about the delay in the implementation of the transitional security arrangements, as set out chapter II of the Revitalized Agreement, and I call upon the Government of South Sudan to ensure proper training and funding of the Necessary Unified Forces.

65. I welcome the continued access to barracks provided by the Government of South Sudan to the United Nations for screening and age verification exercises and encourage the continuation of such efforts. I remain concerned by the number of children recruited and used, particularly by government security forces. I call upon the Government of South Sudan and other parties to immediately cease and prevent the recruitment and use of children and to release associated children.

66. Concerted and collective advocacy and action by the Government and the international community are required to address the root causes of child recruitment. Effective measures must be implemented that emphasize long-term sustainable development and peacebuilding efforts to create stable environments that discourage the recruitment of children. Such measures include supporting the enforcement of robust legal frameworks to prosecute those responsible for recruiting and using children in conflict, as well as access to education.

67. I am troubled by the high number of children killed and maimed and by the fact that over half of child casualties were caused by explosive remnants of war. I urge all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and better protect children, including in the conduct of military operations and from the risks and effects of explosive remnants of war. In addition, I encourage donors and the international community to fund child-focused explosive ordnance risk education and response programmes for children affected by explosive remnants of war.

68. I reiterate my concern about the rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in South Sudan and call upon the Government to urgently strengthen the legal framework for the prosecution of sexual violence against children, as the failure to address impunity perpetuates a cycle of violence.

69. I reiterate the need for funding for sustainable, timely and child-sensitive reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, survivor-centred and gender-sensitive services and assistance programmes for survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the strengthening of accountability mechanisms, and I call upon the Government to invest in these efforts.

70. I urge the Government of South Sudan to demonstrate a strong commitment to child protection by fulfilling its financial obligations under its 2020 Comprehensive Action Plan. Those obligations include the funding of oversight structures, such as technical committees, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration bodies and processes, and mine action initiatives.

71. Furthermore, I call upon the Government of South Sudan, the international community and partners to commit to and continue supporting South Sudan during this critical stage. That support is crucial in reducing the vulnerability of conflict-affected children and their exposure to grave violations arising from the convergence of humanitarian, climate and economic crises in South Sudan.