

## 26. Children and armed conflict

During the period under review, the Security Council held two meetings in connection with the item entitled “Children and armed conflict”.<sup>873</sup> One meeting took the form of a briefing and the other as an open debate. More information on the meeting, including on participants, speakers and outcome, is provided in table 1 below.<sup>874</sup>

On 13 February, at the initiative of Malta, which held the presidency for the month,<sup>875</sup> the Council heard the briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and a civil society briefer.

In her remarks, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict stated that with 25 situations monitored through the children and armed conflict agenda, the prevention of conflict and sustaining peace, as envisaged in resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), had never been more urgent.<sup>876</sup> She pointed out that understanding and identifying the pre-existing risks for children and their vulnerabilities were critical to the protection of children and the prevention of violations of their rights. She noted that sustainably addressing the situation of children already facing other forms of violence and abuses, as well as the main drivers of recruitment, could help to break the cycle of the occurrence and recurrence of conflicts and underlined the need to invest in a long-term response that tackled the root causes of conflict.

Going forward, she underscored a multitude of tools and initiatives developed at various levels for protecting children, including 41 action plans put in place by warring parties and joint prevention plans developed with Governments. However, in her view, more needed to be done to develop common approaches to prevention at the national, regional and subregional levels and to provide Governments willing to engage in that direction with sufficient capacity to do so through sharing best practices, capacity-building and follow-up on existing protection and prevention

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<sup>873</sup> For more information on the format of meetings, see part II.

<sup>874</sup> See [A/78/2](#), part II, chap. 13.

<sup>875</sup> A concept note was circulated by a letter dated 2 February 2023 ([S/2023/80](#)). See also [A/77/825-S/2023/233](#).

<sup>876</sup> See [S/PV.9258](#).

commitments, as well as conducting a mapping of vulnerabilities on the ground in close collaboration with United Nations entities. In that connection, she informed the Council that her Office had strengthened partnership with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to better address the continuum of violence and anticipate risks before, during and in the aftermath of conflicts in order to close the conflict loop. In closing, she stressed that the best way to protect children was to prevent violations from occurring, which included delivering on the improved reintegration of children and finding sustainable solutions for peace to which children themselves contribute, and the Council stood poised to undertake that task.

The Special Representative on Violence against Children pointed out that conflicts remained the biggest driver of protection challenges worldwide and a major threat to children. She believed that the prevention of the six grave violations against children across the conflict continuum was possible if, first, children's pre-existing risks and vulnerabilities were identified and duly addressed before conflict erupted; secondly, the highest standards of protection, including the provision of access to humanitarian aid and support for children and their caregivers, were adhered to by all parties during conflict; and thirdly, support and investment in rebuilding their lives were consistently provided after conflict. She shared her thoughts on how to establish integrated national child protection systems to ensure effective and proactive preventive measures, which included: i) identifying the vulnerable children and their locality through establishing centralized in-country information management system; ii) providing easy access to humanitarian aid and support for all children; iii) strengthening cross-border cooperation and ensuring child-friendly border management to reduce the risk of child abduction and trafficking in conflict setting; and iv) involving children in informing and shaping all actions to address child protection. She highlighted that enhancing the participation of children, boys and girls, in decision-making and establishing long-term policies to address their aspirations and needs were fundamental to building a sustained peace.

The civil society briefer shared with the Council her work as a peacebuilding practitioner in prevention, children's rights and gender-related issues in Cameroon. She recommended that children's perspectives on peace should be integrated in all peace initiatives. In order to do so,

she opined that States must encourage the involvement of children and youth of diverse identities in the design and implementation of projects and programmes, remove technical and financial barriers standing in the way of their participation, invest in education, strengthen the accountability through building synergies between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other treaties and mechanisms, and ensure that the diversity of children's experiences in conflict be factored into the development of law, policy and practice. Concluding, she maintained that children could play a key role in peacebuilding and the protection of children's human rights and that they were key stakeholders capable of driving society transformation.

The discussions following the briefings focused on preventive measures for the protection of children. Many speakers highlighted the importance of the adoption of resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), which underscored the protection of children as key to preventing conflict and sustaining peace.<sup>877</sup> Several delegations stressed the importance of identifying the root causes of conflicts, including social, economic and ideological factors, which set the stage for confrontations and left children in situations of vulnerability.<sup>878</sup> Some Council members elaborated on the linkage between education and the prevention of conflict as well as the protection of children<sup>879</sup>, with several noting that education was safeguarded under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as political frameworks such as the Safe Schools Declaration and the Paris Principles, and thus, called for States to ratify the relevant international treaties and endorse these international instruments.<sup>880</sup> Several speakers emphasized the role of early warning in conflict prevention and resolution as well as sustaining peace.<sup>881</sup> The representative of Ghana added that early warning and violence-monitoring efforts should employ relevant child-sensitive indicators to identify risk factors leading to grave violations against children, and urged regional organizations to deepen their collaboration with civil society organizations in the area of early warning and early response. The representative of Malta opined that early warning should be informed by survivor-centered approaches, as conflict-related

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<sup>877</sup> Ibid., Malta, Ecuador, Switzerland, Russian Federation, Ghana, United Arab Emirates and Japan.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid., Ecuador, Gabon and Mozambique.

<sup>879</sup> Ibid., Malta, France, China, Ecuador, Switzerland, Albania, Brazil, Ghana, United Arab Emirates and Japan.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid., Malta, France, Ecuador, Albania and United Arab Emirates.

<sup>881</sup> Ibid., Malta, Ecuador, Russian Federation and Ghana.

sexual violence was often preceded by discrimination, persecution, hate speech and incitement to violence based on gender or group identity.

On 5 July, an open debate was held at the initiative of the United Kingdom, which held the Presidency for the month,<sup>882</sup> and in connection with the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.<sup>883</sup> The Council heard briefings from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Deputy Executive Director for Programmes at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a child civil society representative.

In her remarks, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict noted that the coverage of the Secretary-General's report had expanded since 2017 to cover five geographical regions and 26 situations, with three situations added in 2022, and Haiti and the Niger added in 2023.<sup>884</sup> She noted that the challenges the world faced had also increased and were layered on each other. She reported that the United Nations had verified 27,180 grave violations against 18,890 children in 2022, with killing or maiming, use and recruitment and abduction of children had increased and remained the violations verified at the highest level. She reported that the verified attacks on schools and hospitals had increased 112 per cent as compared to 2021. In addition, she noted that the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes remained a major concern and humanitarian assistance for children and communities was increasingly under threat. She also noted that child victims were punished for their circumstances and justice and accountability continued to elude children. She underscored that the main perpetrators of the violations and abuses against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access in 2022 were the armed and security forces of Governments.

On positive developments, she noted that the number of incidents of the recruitment and use of children had decreased overall in 2022 in comparison with that in 2017. She also

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<sup>882</sup> A concept note was circulated by a letter dated 23 June 2023 ([S/2023/470](#)).

<sup>883</sup> See [S/2023/470](#).

<sup>884</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#).

underlined the positive achievements accomplished through engagement with parties to the conflict and progress achieved through the adoption of handover protocols, the development of child protection policies, the strengthening of legislation and the integration of child protection in peace processes and national dialogues. Furthermore, she underlined that the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism was only as strong as the resources and capacities given for its operations, particularly as five new situations had been added to the agenda of children and armed conflict between 2022 and 2023. Lastly, she highlighted four areas to work on in 2023 and onward, namely: advocating for the peaceful resolution of conflict; improving the directives for monitors to best identify grave violations; increasing the resources available for child protection expertise on the ground; and developing a new public awareness campaign aimed at putting the voices of children at the center of work.

The Deputy Executive Director for Programmes at UNICEF noted that the Secretary-General's report for the year of 2022 had recorded the highest numbers of grave violations and the situations of concern. He pointed out that the highest number of grave violations were mostly verified in long-standing protracted conflicts. Highlighting the achievements made so far under the children and armed conflict agenda, he commended the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism as one of the greatest strengths of the children and armed conflict agenda for enabling the United Nations and its partners to better target their efforts at preventing grave violations and supporting victims. He also applauded Member States that had made commitments to keeping children safe during the Oslo Conference of June 2023 on Protecting Children in Armed Conflict. On the other hand, he expressed disappointment at the lack of progress by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in adopting conclusions from the Secretary-General's country reports, which in his view was an important tool for senior leaders and practitioners on the ground to strengthen advocacy. Furthermore, he called on Member States to enable and support United Nations' engagement with armed groups, which were responsible for 50 percent of grave violations. Lastly, he called on Member States to scale up support to sustain efforts to provide children with humanitarian services and to document grave violations.

Describing how children were victimized in conflict-stricken Colombia, the child civil society briefer of the country stated that children should be involved in peacebuilding processes. She made the following recommendations: i) to condemn and prevent recruitment of children by any armed groups and to implement and fund for the reintegration of child soldiers; ii) to restructure the vision of security for Colombia to prevent future violence against young people; iii) to strongly condemn the sexual violence committed against children and adolescents and to take immediate measures to prevent and redress such violence; iv) to undertake necessary reforms to guarantee coverage and access to quality education, especially in rural and remote areas, in compliance with the guidelines of the Safe School Declaration; v) to ensure the integral development and peace education of children and young people in rural areas. Lastly, she called on the Council and its members to be the guarantors of the Colombian peace agreement of 2016 and to continue generating possible solutions to the resurgence of armed conflict in the country. She proposed the creation of a commission committed to defending human rights and the social rule of law and to supporting peace negotiations as well as the participation of children in these processes. She concluded by emphasizing that peace would not be established by merely signing a paper with certain groups, but that it must be worked for and maintained by all, including children, adolescence, and youth.

In the subsequent discussions, speakers expressed concern about the continued increase of grave violations committed against children in the year of 2022 as indicated in the Secretary-General's report.<sup>885</sup> On ways of preventing grave violations against children, some speakers underlined that lasting peace was the ultimate guarantee of children's security,<sup>886</sup> and that they therefore considered conflict prevention and resolution through peaceful means as the best approach to protecting children.<sup>887</sup> Speakers also stressed that socioeconomic development, including access to education and health care, eradication of poverty, could help to prevent grave violations against children.<sup>888</sup> Several delegations expressed concern about the use of explosive

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<sup>885</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) and [S/2023/363](#).

<sup>886</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (China, Albania, Brazil and Mozambique) and; [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Guatemala, Algeria and Argentina).

<sup>887</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (Ecuador and United Arab Emirates); and [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Argentina and Thailand).

<sup>888</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (China, Mozambique, Japan, Gabon, United Arab Emirates and Portugal); and [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Guatemala, Qatar, Denmark, Bulgaria and Iran (Islamic Republic of)).

devices on the battlefield and opined that mine action could contribute to preventing grave violations against children and ensuring their freedom from fear.<sup>889</sup> Echoing the recommendations of the Secretary-General in his report,<sup>890</sup> some speakers called for the inclusion of provisions and capacities for child protection in the relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions.<sup>891</sup> Reaffirming the importance of compliance to the relevant international framework, speakers also urged Member States to ratify and implement the legal instruments available to ensure the protection of children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols as well as the international framework, such as the Paris Principles and the Safe School Declaration.<sup>892</sup>

Regarding the existing tools monitoring the grave violations, some delegations opined that the Council should continue to support the work of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and to provide it with resources necessary to facilitate response to threats against children.<sup>893</sup> Some speakers underscored that the annual report of the Secretary-General and its independent, objective impartial and transparent mechanism formed essential pillars of the framework.<sup>894</sup> The representative of China stated that the annual report should adhere to the principle of non-politicization and avoid double standards and selective blind spots.<sup>895</sup> The representative of Ukraine welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to include the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups in the annex to his report while the representative of the Russian Federation expressed his view that the Secretary-General took a political decision to include the Russian armed forces and not the armed forces of Ukraine in the annex of parties engaging in violations against children.

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<sup>889</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (Ghana, Japan, Ecuador, Gabon, Poland); and [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Austria, Slovenia, Guatemala, San Marino, Bulgaria, Algeria and Ireland).

<sup>890</sup> See [S/2023/363](#), para. 329.

<sup>891</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (Malta, Ghana, Brazil, Mexico, Republic of Korea); and [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (New Zealand (also on behalf of Canada and Australia), Malaysia, Egypt, South Africa and India).

<sup>892</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (France, Switzerland, Mozambique, Gabon, United Kingdom, Portugal, Republic of Korea); and [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Austria, Slovenia, Thailand, Croatia, Dominican Republic, San Marino, Bulgaria, Germany, Malaysia, and Argentina).

<sup>893</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (France, Ghana, Switzerland, Ecuador, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom); and [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Uruguay, New Zealand (also on behalf of Canada and Australia)).

<sup>894</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#) (Malta, Switzerland, Portugal and Liechtenstein); and [S/PV.9366 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Canada and Belgium).

<sup>895</sup> See [S/PV.9366](#).

In 2023, the Council addressed the children and armed conflict agenda in several of its country- and region-specific decisions and in decisions relating to thematic items. Selected provisions of decisions in which the Council explicitly referenced actions or measures concerning the agenda during 2023 are listed in table 2.

In 2023, the Council, *inter alia*: (a) condemned and demanded the cessation of violations and abuses against children, including attacks on schools and the deprivation of access to education, and called for accountability and compliance with international instruments; (b) called for the implementation of action plans and programmes on children and armed conflict, with new emphasis on preventing and responding to sexual violence against children; (c) underscored the importance of taking into account child protection concerns in the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration processes and security sector reform; (d) requested monitoring, analysis and reporting on violations and abuses against children; (e) mandated United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions with child protection tasks; and (f) called for the protection, respect and promotion of the right to education in armed conflict. During the review period, the Council did not impose any new measures or called for the imposition of measures against perpetrators of violations against children.

**Table 1**  
**Meetings: Children and armed conflict, 2023**

<i>Meeting record and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
<a href="#">S/PV.9258</a> (13 February 2023)				Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Civil society briefer.	All Council members All invitees <sup>a</sup>	
<a href="#">S/PV.9366</a> (5 July 2023)	How to prevent and respond to grave violations against		57 member states <sup>b</sup>	Special Representative of the Secretary-	All Council members All invitees <sup>c</sup>	

<i>Meeting record and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
<a href="#">S/PV.9366 (resumption 1)</a> (5 July 2023)	children in armed conflict  Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ( <a href="#">S/2023/363</a> )  Letter dated 23 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General ( <a href="#">S/2023/470</a> )			General for Children and Armed Conflict, Deputy Executive Director for Programmes at the United Nations Children's Fund, child civil society representative, European Union, Palestine		

<sup>a</sup> Ms. Divina participated in the meeting via videoconference.

<sup>b</sup> Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uruguay and Yemen.

<sup>c</sup> The representative of Canada spoke on behalf of Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. The representative of New Zealand also spoke on behalf of Canada and Australia. The representative of Estonia spoke also on behalf of Latvia and Lithuania. The representative of Denmark also spoke on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden).

**Table 2**  
**Selection of provisions relevant to children and armed conflict, by theme and agenda item**

	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Paragraph</i>
<b>Condemnation of, and demands for cessation of, violations and abuses against children and calls for accountability and compliance with international instruments</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	10, 23, 24, 27
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/3</a> Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	5, 11 9, 10
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution <a href="#">2705 (2023)</a>	8, 8 (a) (i), (iii), (iv), 8 (b)(i)(ii)(iv), 11 (c)
	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian questions	Resolution <a href="#">2720 (2023)</a>	11

	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Paragraph</i>
<b>Action plans and programmes on children and armed conflict</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	8, 12
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	16, 17
<b>Child protection in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	36 (d)(i)
<b>Monitoring, analysis and reporting on violations and abuses against children</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in Afghanistan	Resolution <a href="#">2679 (2023)</a>	2
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	3(d)(ii)
		Resolution <a href="#">2683 (2023)</a>	22
	Peace and security in Africa	Resolution <a href="#">2713 (2023)</a>	26, 28
<b>Child protection mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	36(a)(iv), 37(a)(ii), 50
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	23, 34 (i)(e), (ii)(h)(i)(l), 37
	The situation in Iraq	Resolution <a href="#">2682 (2023)</a>	2(c)(i), 2 (f)
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	3(a)(ii)(iii), 3(c)(ii)
	The question concerning Haiti	Resolution <a href="#">2692 (2023)</a>	3
		Resolution <a href="#">2699 (2023)</a>	1 (a), 6, 7
<b>Calls for the protection, respect and promotion of the right to education in armed conflict</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in Afghanistan	Resolution <a href="#">2681 (2023)</a>	2

<sup>a</sup> For additional information on mandates and decisions relevant to peacekeeping and political missions, see part X.