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Children and armed conflict in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia and covers the period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2021.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in Somalia, highlighting trends and patterns with respect to the six grave violations against children, and contains, where available, information on perpetrators. Information is also outlined on the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through dialogue with parties.

The report contains a series of recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in Somalia.



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 October 2019 to 30 September 2021. It is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia 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 Somalia and provides details of the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report (S/2020/174) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/AC.51/2020/6). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the dialogue with parties to the conflict. Where possible, the parties to the conflict responsible for grave violations are identified. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/75/873-S/2021/437), Al-Shabaab is listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction, and attacks on schools and hospitals, under section A, listed parties that had not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children. Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a is listed for recruitment and use of children under section A. The Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces are listed under section B, which contains the parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children.

2. The information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Somalia, co-chaired by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Insecurity and access challenges to conflict-affected areas significantly hampered the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and related response measures, including restrictions on movement, further exacerbated these challenges. Therefore, the information contained in the report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in Somalia during the reporting period and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher. Where incidents were committed earlier but verified only during the reporting period, that information is qualified as relating to an incident that was verified at a later date.

II. Overview of political and security developments

3. The political and security situation in Somalia was marked by political tensions, continued attacks by Al-Shabaab and fighting between clan militias. Environmental and public health emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic and recurring floods and droughts, exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation.

4. Following a two-year political stalemate, dialogue between the Federal Government and all federal member states was restored in 2020, and an agreement on an indirect electoral model was reached on 17 September 2020. Simultaneously, divergence on the agreement's implementation persisted and opposition parties expressed concern over limited political space. In December 2020, protests in Mogadishu, called by opposition groups over the electoral process, led to violence and the excessive use of force by the Somali Police Force, resulting in civilian casualties. Clan-affiliated militias reportedly participated in the clashes.

5. Following several attempts at dialogue, a special electoral bill for federal elections, voiding the agreement of 17 September and mandating a one-person, one-

vote electoral process within two years, was signed in April 2021. Amid mounting political tension, fighting erupted in Mogadishu on 25 April 2021 between security forces loyal to the Federal Government and military personnel with ties to the opposition. In May 2021, the Federal Government and the federal member states agreed to resolve contentious issues, following which a revised electoral timeline was issued. Upper House elections began on 29 July 2021 in all federal member states and were nearly finalized at the time of reporting, with 52 out of 54 seats selected, of which 14 were filled by women. Significant delays persisted in the timeline for the House of the People and presidential elections.

6. In late 2020, there were numerous reports of fighting, due to land disputes or clan affiliations, within different security agencies at both the federal and the state levels, particularly between the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force. Security forces were also reported to have used excessive force during crowd control operations and in settling disputes in their communities in defence of their clan affiliation.

7. Meanwhile, tensions arose between the Federal Government and the President of Jubbaland, Ahmed Mohamed Islam “Madobe”, following the state presidential election of August 2019. The deployment of Somali National Army forces to the Gedo Region of Jubbaland, near the Kenyan border in early 2020, resulted in clashes between the Somali National Army and local militias, which caused significant population displacement. Clashes erupted again in January 2021, resulting in civilian casualties and new displacements, including of children.

8. Efforts were made, in late 2019, to foster dialogue between the Federal Government and “Somaliland” and reduce tensions in the disputed areas of Sool and Sanaag. Overall, relations between Puntland and “Somaliland” remained stable, although in February 2020, intermittent skirmishes between forces loyal to Puntland and “Somaliland” resumed in the disputed areas, in breach of the ceasefire brokered in 2018 by the United Nations and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

9. In Galmudug, in February 2020, following heavy fighting in the Dhuusamarreeb area between Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a, the Somali National Army and the specialized “Haramcad” police unit, the Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a leadership surrendered to the Federal Government. The return of the Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a leadership to the area in late 2021 triggered the remobilization of some of the group’s former fighters, which was followed by clashes between Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a and the Somali National Army in September 2021, leading to temporary changes in territorial control and population displacement, including of children.

10. In the meantime, Al-Shabaab remained the most immediate security threat in Somalia, with most security incidents and civilian casualties, including children, attributed to the group, which continued to control large parts of central and southern Somalia. Despite ongoing efforts by Somali and international forces to curb Al-Shabaab’s operational capacity, the group’s capability to conduct complex attacks against government officials, security forces, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and civilian targets remained undiminished. Al-Shabaab continued to rely on asymmetrical means of warfare, including explosive devices and targeted assassinations. In several instances, mortar attacks by the group targeted the international airport complex, in which the United Nations compound is located. Al-Shabaab continued to generate sufficient revenue to sustain its activities through a wide range of extortion methods. Separately, activities by Da’esh¹ in Somalia

¹ Following the adoption of resolution 75/291 by the General Assembly, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is now referred to as Da’esh in documents originating from the United Nations Secretariat.

continued but were limited to periodic incidents, such as improvised explosive device attacks against government security forces in Puntland. Security operations by government security forces and AMISOM targeted Al-Shabaab and to a lesser extent Da'esh elements.

11. The human rights and protection situation in Somalia remained extremely volatile and human rights violations, such as arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention, violations of the freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, and attacks on journalists, were frequently reported. Also notable was a substantial increase in gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence, exacerbated by national measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. Displaced populations were at particular risk of being subjected to violations and abuses, and the forced eviction of displaced persons from their dwellings, one of the main triggers of secondary displacement, remained concerning.

12. The humanitarian crisis in Somalia further deepened during the reporting period and was characterized by multiple shocks, including the combined impact of recurrent droughts and seasonal floods, intensified by climate change, and a massive desert locust upsurge that began in late 2019. Disease outbreaks, including of cholera and measles, remained a major concern, as did widespread food insecurity. As at September 2021, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2.9 million people were internally displaced, nearly two thirds of whom were under 18 years of age. Access challenges, especially due to insecurity and to Al-Shabaab's control of southern and central Somalia, remained a major obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

13. On 16 March 2020, Somalia confirmed its first case of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation, placed additional strain on the weak health-care system and had a significant economic impact. Measures to curb the spread of the virus, including the closure of Somali air space and of schools for several months, as well as curfews, movement restrictions and the suspension of public gatherings, had considerable effects on vulnerable populations and further complicated the delivery of assistance to populations in need.

III. Update on the main actors involved in the armed conflict in Somalia

Federal Government of Somalia security forces

14. In the Provisional Federal Constitution, the Federal Government of Somalia security forces are defined as its national army, intelligence services, police and prison forces. These entities include the Somali National Army, the Somali Police Force and the National Intelligence and Security Agency. According to the agreement on the national security architecture of 2017, the Somali police shall be composed of 32,000 members, divided among federal and state police, while the army shall be composed of at least 18,000 members, excluding the special forces, Navy and Air Force.

15. As at November 2020, the total number of police in Somalia, including the Somali Police Force and federal member state police, was estimated at 16,813 personnel. A specialized unit within the Somali Police Force also exists, known as the "Haramcad" unit, specifically trained to fight Al-Shabaab.

16. A Somali National Army map, provided by the Ministry of Defence, showed military presence in seven Somali National Army sectors, specifically Garoowe (Puntland), Kismaayo (Jubbaland), Baidoa (South-West State), Dhuusamarreeb (Galmudug), Jawhar (Hirshabelle), Marka (Shabelle Hoose) and Mogadishu

(Banaadir). Other military units include the Danab special forces and the Gorgor special forces.

Regional forces

17. Various regional forces, composed mostly of clan militias, are aligned with the federal member states. These include the Jubbaland, Galmudug, Puntland and South-West State forces. Since the adoption of the national security architecture, progress in integrating the regional forces into the Somali security forces has been slow, hampered by political tensions between the Federal Government and the federal member states. In 2018, 2,400 members of the Puntland forces were integrated into the Somali National Army.

18. The level of integration of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a into the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces initiated by the Federal Government on 5 July 2019, as reported in the previous report (S/2020/174), remained unclear. On 29 February 2020, the leadership of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a surrendered to the Federal Government after heavy fighting with the Somali National Army in Galmudug. In September 2021, Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a was reported to have regrouped in Galmudug, which was followed by tensions and fighting with both federal and regional Somali security forces.

Armed groups

19. Al-Shabaab continued to operate under a well-organized structure, maintained territorial control in multiple areas and generated revenues to maintain its operations. The group relied on the mass recruitment of children to bolster its ranks and used abductions as an important means for the purpose of recruitment and use of children and rape and other forms of sexual violence, including forced marriage.

20. Da'esh elements continued to be present in Somalia and carried out few operations during the reporting period.

21. The term "clan militia" continued to be used to refer to a plethora of militia groups aligned with clans in different parts of Somalia.

Other actors

22. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) continued to assist the Somali National Army in fighting against Al-Shabaab and other armed groups, with an authorized troop strength of 19,626 uniformed personnel, inclusive of a minimum of 1,040 police personnel. Its military components comprise troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Its police component is mandated to mentor, train and advise Somali police forces at the federal and state levels.

23. In addition to troops operating under AMISOM command, Ethiopia and Kenya both continued to maintain troops in Somalia.

24. The United States Africa Command is continuing its engagement in Somalia.

IV. Grave violations against children

25. The country task force verified 8,042 grave violations against 6,501 children (5,108 boys, 1,393 girls). The total number of verified violations was lower than that reported in the previous report, which covered a three-year period. Violations spiked in 2020, including as a result of COVID-19 response measures, in particular the closure of schools, which exacerbated children's exposure to grave violations.

26. The violations were attributed to Al-Shabaab (5,517), the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (614) (Somali Police Force (329) and Somali National Army (285)), clan militias (339), regional forces (306) (Jubbaland forces (101), Puntland forces (77), Galmudug forces (51), Puntland police (42), Jubbaland police (16), South-West forces (9), Galmudug police (7) and Hirshabelle police (3)), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (11), AMISOM (8), the National Intelligence and Security Agency (6), Da'esh (3), the Kenya Defence Forces (3), "Somaliland" forces (2), the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (2), "Somaliland" police (1) and Westland militia (1). The remaining 1,229 violations were committed by unidentified armed elements. At least 1,370 children were affected by multiple violations. Violations were verified in Juba Dhexe (1,281), Bay (1,126), Shabelle Hoose (876), Banaadir (Mogadishu) (741), Juba Hoose (706), Hiraan (694), Galguduud (688), Shabelle Dhexe (626), Gedo (532), Bakool (394), Mudug (187), Bari (148), Sool (27) and Nugal (16).

27. The recruitment and use (2,852), abduction (2,502) and killing and maiming (1,857) of children were the three most verified violations, accounting for 90 per cent of the total. Attacks on schools and hospitals (99) were verified at lower levels compared with the previous reporting period, while incidents of sexual violence against children persisted at high levels (701).

28. Owing to access constraints, in particular to areas under the control of Al-Shabaab, and other constraints on monitoring and reporting, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in Somalia, with the actual number of violations likely to be significantly higher.

A. Recruitment and use

29. The recruitment and use of 2,852 children (2,752 boys, 100 girls), as young as 10 years old, was verified. Of these, 261 children were recruited and used during the fourth quarter of 2019, 1,716 children in 2020 and 875 children during the first three quarters of 2021. Al-Shabaab remained the main perpetrator, responsible for the recruitment and use of 2,259 children (2,181 boys, 78 girls), representing 80 per cent of all cases. Other perpetrators included the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (311) (Somali Police Force (190) and Somali National Army (121)), clan militias (108), regional forces (156) (Jubbaland forces (56), Galmudug forces (46), Puntland forces (41), Galmudug police (5), Jubbaland police (3), Puntland police (3) and Hirshabelle police (2)), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (11), the National Intelligence and Security Agency (5) and "Somaliland" forces (2). The children were recruited in Juba Dhexe (560), Bay (461), Shabelle Hoose (339), Galguduud (331), Hiraan (252), Banaadir (Mogadishu) (229), Gedo (199), Juba Hoose (148), Shabelle Dhexe (141), Bakool (93), Mudug (57), Sool (17), Nugal (15) and Bari (10).

30. Seventy-six per cent of the children (2,165) were used for unknown purposes, while 446 children were used in support roles, including as bodyguards, cleaners and to operate checkpoints, and the remaining 241 children were used as fighters. Girls were predominantly used for domestic work, including as cooks or cleaners, while boys were used as bodyguards, guards or messengers. Girls were also used as screeners at checkpoints and entrances to government installations.

31. Methods of child recruitment included abduction from their homes or schools by armed groups (1,514 children or 50 per cent), persuasion by local leaders, relatives or parents (877 children or 30 per cent) and unknown methods (461 children or 15 per cent). Mass abductions of children for the purpose of recruitment and use continued to be of concern. Social and economic factors, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, were also among the drivers for child recruitment and use.

32. Al-Shabaab continued to scale up its recruitment and use of children in response to ongoing large-scale operations by the Somali National Army, AMISOM and international forces in several regions of the country, including Juba Dhexe, Juba Hoose, Shabelle Dhexe, Shabelle Hoose, Hiraan and Galmudug. There was a significant increase in the number of children recruited and used in areas under the control of Al-Shabaab. Despite decreasing reports of clan elders being ordered to hand over children to Al-Shabaab, the group continued to target madrasas (local religious schools) as an avenue for recruitment. Communities have been increasingly defying orders by Al-Shabaab to provide children for recruitment and have opted to move children to other towns, leading to varying degrees of displacement and family separation. The group also increasingly ordered communities to enrol children, predominantly boys, for religious studies at specific institutions that were either managed by the group or run by sympathizers. Children were often recruited from these religious studies institutions after undergoing indoctrination and military training. Furthermore, 30 per cent of the children (877) were recruited by Al-Shabaab through peer-to-peer persuasion or dedicated recruiters. The group targeted children and youth through public gatherings and promised incentives to young recruits.

33. The country task force verified the recruitment and use by Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (311), including the continuing trend of children used as bodyguards for senior officers, to guard security bases or operate checkpoints. Child bodyguards and guards were typically armed and in uniform. On 12 July 2021, a girl, aged between 14 and 15 years, recruited by the Somali National Army, was seen armed and dressed in a Somali National Army uniform inspecting vehicles and driver identifications at a security checkpoint in Shabelle Dhexe Region. Most of the 190 children recruited and used by the Somali Police Force were used in support roles. For instance, in November 2019, a boy aged between 15 and 17 years was verified as guarding a government office in Karan district, Banaadir. The boy was armed and dressed in a Somali Police Force uniform. On 20 September 2020, a girl aged around 16 years old was verified as operating a checkpoint while armed and dressed in a Somali Police Force uniform in Banaadir. Incidents of recruitment and use of children by federal member state police services and regional forces also remained of concern.

34. Cases attributed to Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a reduced significantly after the group was reportedly integrated into the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces in July 2019, although the recruitment and use of 11 children between July and September 2021 was verified when Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a resumed its armed activities in late 2021.

Deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with armed forces or armed groups

35. Some 415 children (411 boys, 4 girls), aged between 11 and 17 years, were detained by federal and regional government security forces for their alleged association with armed groups. The Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (322), (Somali Police Force (241) and Somali National Army (81)), accounted for most of these detentions, followed by regional forces (88) (Jubbaland forces (41), Puntland forces (12) Jubbaland police (12), Galmudug police (11), Puntland police (8) and Galmudug forces (4)) and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (5).

36. The arrests and detentions took place in Banaadir (Mogadishu) (213), Shabelle Hoose (64), Juba Hoose (49), Shabelle Dhexe (30), Galguduud (13), Gedo (13), Bari (12), Mudug (12) and Hiraan (9). Some 223 children (53.7 per cent) were later released, and the whereabouts of 1 child is unknown, while the remaining 191 children (46 per cent) remained in detention at the time of reporting. Children were detained for periods ranging from three days to several months.

B. Killing and maiming

37. The killing (394) and maiming (1,463) of 1,857 children (1,388 boys, 469 girls) as young as infants, was verified. Of these, 167 child casualties occurred in the fourth quarter of 2019, 1,087 in 2020 and 603 between January and September of 2021. The main perpetrators were Al-Shabaab (576), the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (223) (Somali Police Force (105) and Somali National Army (118)), clan militias (138), regional forces (122) (Puntland police (34), Jubbaland forces (34), Puntland forces (31), Jubbaland police (9), South-West forces (8), Galmudug forces (4), Galmudug police (1) and Hirshabelle police (1)), AMISOM (8), Da'esh (3), the Kenya Defence Forces (3), the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (2), "Somaliland" police (1) and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (1), although the majority of child casualties (780) remained unattributed. The violations were verified in Banaadir (Mogadishu) (440), Juba Hoose (277), Shabelle Hoose (272), Galguduud (137), Bari (121), Juba Dhexe (104), Hiraan (103), Bay (93), Shabelle Dhexe (89), Gedo (83), Bakool (74), Mudug (56), Sool (7) and Nugal (1). Of the 1,463 maimed children, 1,222 children (891 boys, 331 girls) (80 per cent) were provided with psychosocial and medical support and transportation by the country task force.

38. The five main causes of child casualties, representing 71 per cent of cases (1,317 children), were crossfire between armed forces and groups and failure to take adequate precautions to protect children during military operations (555); explosive devices, including improvised explosive devices, such as vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and radio-controlled improvised explosive devices, mines, explosive remnants of war (342); gunshots (249); physical assault (133); and indiscriminate shooting (38). There was a significant increase in killing and maiming of children owing to the intensification of conflict, armed confrontations between parties to conflict, and increased attacks utilizing improvised explosive devices, predominantly by Al-Shabaab. For example, on 25 January 2021, heavy fighting with several crossfire incidents erupted between Jubbaland forces and the Somali National Army in Beled Xaawo district, leaving 20 civilians dead, including 14 children (8 boys, 6 girls) and many public properties and houses burned down. On 31 January 2021, 19 children (18 boys, 1 girl) aged between 6 and 12 years were killed (6) and maimed (13) in Shabelle Hoose Region when a device they were playing with exploded.

39. Cases of killing and maiming attributed to AMISOM often resulted from indiscriminate shooting and mortar attacks by AMISOM soldiers to repulse attacks by armed groups on their convoys or camps. For instance, on 25 March 2020, AMISOM forces based in Shabelle Hoose Region, fired mortar rounds towards Cadiimoole and Kaytooy villages following information on an impending attack from Al-Shabaab, injuring two boys aged between 16 and 17 years.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

40. The country task force verified rape and other forms of sexual violence against 701 children (7 boys, 694 girls), with 60 girls affected in the fourth quarter of 2019, 406 children in 2020 and 235 children between January and September 2021. Most violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (427) owing to difficulties in identifying specific perpetrators and their affiliations in areas where numerous unidentified armed elements are present. The remaining cases were attributed to Al-Shabaab (103), the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (72) (Somali Police Force (30) and Somali National Army (42)), clan militias (71) and regional forces (28) (Jubbaland forces (11), Puntland forces (5), Puntland police (5), Jubbaland police (4), Galmudug police (1), South-West forces (1) and Galmudug forces (1)). Violations

occurred in Gedo (116), Juba Dhexe (100), Bakool (83), Bay (81), Juba Hoose (67), Hiraan (63), Banaadir (Mogadishu) (54), Shabelle Dhexe (43), Galguduud (40), Mudug (39), Bari (8), Shabelle Hoose (5) and Sool (2).

41. The cases verified were rape (455), attempted rape (130), forced marriage (79), sexual harassment (26) and sexual assault (21). Of the children affected, 482 (4 boys, 478 girls) were provided with services ranging from psychosocial support to medical assistance, including HIV post-exposure prophylaxis kits, as well as transportation to medical facilities by the country task force. Rape and attempted rape often occurred in camps for internally displaced persons or when children collected firewood or water or looked after animals. For instance, on 22 July 2020, two girls, approximately between 15 and 17 years old, were brutally raped by three unidentified armed perpetrators in Bakool Region, when they were collecting firewood from a small forest. Separately, Al-Shabaab forcibly married 79 girls to its fighters during the reporting period.

42. Accountability for sexual violence remained very low. In 48 cases, perpetrators were arrested, and 33 cases (5 per cent) were resolved traditionally, as described below, while for the remaining 620 cases (90 per cent), the perpetrators remained at large.

43. Sexual violence in Somalia is underreported owing to stigmatization, risk of reprisals, lack of accountability and the absence of adequate support services for survivors. Survivors often experience blame and alienation from their community after enduring sexual violence, especially if they become pregnant as a result. In addition, weak rule of law and impunity persist, with most perpetrators remaining at large. Often, perpetrators who had been identified and arrested were released when communities opted to use local dispute resolution mechanisms instead of the formal justice system. Under the traditional resolution mechanism in Somalia, individual perpetrators are rarely punished, rather the clans or families of perpetrators pay fines to the clans or families of survivors. Occasionally, survivors are forcibly married to their abusers as part of traditional resolution.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

44. The country task force verified 99 attacks on schools (92) and hospitals (7) and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals attributed to Al-Shabaab (92), the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (5) (Somali Police Force (3) and Somali National Army (2)) and clan militias (2). The attacks occurred in Juba Dhexe (29), Hiraan (18), Shabelle Dhexe (18), Bay (9), Galguduud (6), Gedo (5), Juba Hoose (4), Shabelle Hoose (3), Banaadir (Mogadishu) (3), Mudug (2) and Bakool (2). Of these, 15 attacks (14 schools, 1 hospital) occurred in the fourth quarter of 2019, 58 attacks (53 schools, 5 hospitals) in 2020 and 26 attacks (25 schools, 1 hospital) in the first three quarters of 2021.

45. Attacks on schools involved the abduction of teachers and students (69), attacks on education personnel (2), forced closures of schools (11) and the destruction of facilities (1), as well as shelling and other interference (9). This affected access to education for approximately 5,423 students. Attacks on hospitals involved looting or theft (3), other interference (3) and the abduction of medical personnel (1). Approximately 5,423 students were affected by the attacks on schools.

46. Al-Shabaab continued to exert pressure on communities to adopt its school curriculum introduced in areas under its control in April 2017. Most school closures and abduction of teachers by the group were based on claims of the non-compliance of teachers with this school curriculum. For instance, on 27 October 2020, Al-Shabaab attacked and closed a primary school that was providing education to 195

children (115 boys, 80 girls) in Gedo Region after the new Government of Somalia curriculum, which Al-Shabaab has forbidden in areas under its control, had been provided to the school the previous week.

47. The country task force also verified the military use of one school by the Somali National Army. On 14 March 2020, Somali National Army forces in Shabelle Hoose Region used a primary school operated by a local non-governmental organization in preparation for a military operation against Al-Shabaab. The use of the school disrupted the education of 672 students (386 boys, 286 girls). The Somali National Army vacated the school a week later and a mine risk assessment was conducted by the Mine Action Service before children were allowed to return.

E. Abduction

48. The abduction of 2,502 children (2,323 boys, 179 girls), aged between 11 and 17 years, was verified, of which 268 violations occurred during the fourth quarter of 2019, 1,430 in 2020 and 804 between January and September 2021. Al-Shabaab was responsible for 99 per cent of all abductions (2,469), followed by unidentified perpetrators (19), clan militias (13) and Westland militia (1). The violations occurred in Juba Dhexe (488), Bay (481), Shabelle Dhexe (333), Hiraan (257), Shabelle Hoose (254), Juba Hoose (206), Galguduud (169), Bakool (142), Gedo (125), Mudug (32), Bari (9) and Banaadir (Mogadishu) (6).

49. In 80 per cent of the cases, the abductions were conducted for the purpose of recruitment and use (1,514), alleged association with armed forces (257) and non-compliance with Al-Shabaab's dress and behaviour code (235). Of the 2,502 children abducted, 2,039 were still in captivity, 278 had been released, 81 had escaped, 42 had been rescued and 30 had died in custody, while the status of 30 children was unknown at the time of reporting.

50. Mass abductions of children continued to be used by Al-Shabaab as one of its main recruitment tactics. Between October and December 2019, Al-Shabaab abducted 135 boys for recruitment from villages in Bay, Juba Dhexe, Shabelle Dhexe and Gedo. In 2020, in 150 incidents of mass abduction, Al-Shabaab abducted 868 boys, aged between 9 and 16 years. Al-Shabaab also abducted girls to forcibly marry them to its fighters. For instance, on 23 March 2020, a girl, approximately 15 years old, was abducted and forcibly married to an Al-Shabaab member in Shabelle Dhexe.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

51. The country task force verified 32 incidents of denial of humanitarian access affecting the delivery of aid to children. Of these, 5 incidents were verified during the fourth quarter of 2019, 16 in 2020 and 11 between January and September 2021. Most incidents were attributed to Al-Shabaab (18), followed by clan militias (9), the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces (3) (Somali Police Force (1) and Somali National Army (2)) and unidentified perpetrators (1). Incidents included looting, threats and violence against humanitarian personnel, abduction of personnel and restriction of access to beneficiaries. Denials of humanitarian access were verified in Banaadir (Mogadishu) (9), Shabelle Hoose (5), Galguduud (5), Juba Hoose (4), Gedo (4), Sool (1), Hiraan (1), Mudug (1) and Bay (1).

52. For example, on 26 May 2021, a vehicle carrying personnel of a humanitarian organization came under fire at an illegal checkpoint mounted by clan militias in Galguduud Region. The humanitarian personnel were unharmed, and Galmudug authorities later removed the checkpoint. In another incident, on 2 February 2020,

four humanitarian workers were kidnapped by Al-Shabaab while distributing nutrition items to children in Gedo Region. On 13 September 2020, the Police Commissioner in Banaadir (Mogadishu) closed the gender-based violence centre at Madina Hospital, which was the only centre authorized to provide authentic forensic evidence on rape cases and urgent multisectoral and holistic services to survivors of gender-based violence, including clinical management of rape, health care, psychosocial support and legal counselling.

V. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children

A. Progress in the legislative and policy frameworks

53. Limited progress was made regarding domestic legislation and policies on child protection and concerning attempts were made to weaken existing draft legislation on children and on sexual violence. In 2020, there was an attempt to lower the age of majority from 18 years to 15 years in the third draft of the revised Constitution. Following the Presidential Decree of 24 December 2020 to defer the constitutional review process to the next session of Parliament, no tangible progress on the review of the Constitution was made. Under the Provisional Constitution of 2012, the age of majority is established at 18 years.

54. Similarly, in June 2020, a motion to return the sexual offences bill of 2018 to Parliament was dismissed. The sexual offences bill was drafted in a consultative process to strengthen the country's legal framework on the protection of women and girls from sexual violence. Owing to concerns raised by religious leaders, an alternative bill was drafted, known as the sexual intercourse-related crimes bill of 2020. The bill is narrower in scope and contains provisions allowing the marriage of minors at the maturation of an individual's reproductive organs, regardless of the age of the child. The sexual intercourse-related crimes bill remains pending before Parliament. The United Nations has engaged with the Federal Government to address the shortcomings of the bill, including by providing a comparative analysis of the bills.

55. No progress was achieved towards the adoption of the child rights bill of 2019, which remained pending at the cabinet level. In early 2021, amendments were made to fast-track the bill, raising concerns of ambiguity about the age of majority, the absence of the prohibition of forced and child marriage, the absence of provisions to protect orphaned children, and inconsistencies between the child rights bill and the juvenile justice bill regarding the age of criminal responsibility. The United Nations engaged with the Federal Government to discuss the current draft of the bill in the context of the commitments undertaken by Somalia as a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

56. The juvenile justice bill was approved by the Cabinet on 18 February 2021 and, as at September 2021, was before Parliament.

57. In 2019, Somalia submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child under article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A formal review with the Committee is scheduled for 2022.

58. Regarding the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, consultative workshops with national stakeholders, led by the federal Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, were held throughout the reporting period at the federal and the federal member state levels to pave the way for ratification. This

followed a mission of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to Somalia in July 2018.

59. In May 2021, the federal Ministry of Defence finalized its human rights policy, which also addresses sexual violence. The policy underlines how armed conflict disproportionately affects women and children, recognizes Security Council resolution [1960 \(2010\)](#) on sexual violence in conflict, and urges full compliance of Somali National Army troops to prevent all forms of sexual violence.

60. Several other policies, which were supported by the United Nations, remained under review at the federal cabinet level as at September 2021. These included the age verification policy, the diversion policy and the minimum standards for children in detention. A national strategy aimed at preventing child recruitment and use, and at facilitating the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, also still awaited endorsement by the Federal Government at the time of writing.

61. At the federal member state level, some states took measures towards strengthening protection. Draft legislation and policies have been under review, such as a child rights policy in South-West State and a sexual offences bill and a child protection policy in Jubbaland.

62. The standard operating procedures for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups to child protection actors, endorsed by the Government of Somalia in 2014 as part of the implementation of its action plan to end and prevent recruitment and use, signed in 2012, continued to be applied inconsistently. The time children spent in detention often exceeded the 72-hour time limit stipulated in the standard operating procedures.

63. In 2021, the country task force also engaged with the federal Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education to draft a national policy and guidelines on the Safe Schools Declaration. The policy, if endorsed by the Education Sector Coordination Committee, would reinforce the commitment of Somalia to the Safe Schools Declaration, which it endorsed in October 2015.

B. Follow-up on dialogue and implementation of action plans

64. Supported by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the country task force continued to engage with the Federal Government to facilitate the implementation of its 2012 action plans on ending and preventing the recruitment and use, and the killing and maiming of children, as well as the 2019 road map adopted to expedite their implementation at the federal member state level and to ensure that their provisions are applied to the Somali security forces, in particular the police.

65. In November 2019, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Mogadishu and Baidoa to participate in the signing of the road map, to advocate for improved child protection and to assess dynamics and challenges on the ground. During her visit, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, chaired by Denmark, was established and a project for the prevention of child recruitment and for community-based integration, funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, was launched.

66. In the light of an increase in rape and other forms of sexual violence verified in 2020 and the listing of the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces for this violation in 2021 in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), the country task force engaged with key line ministries at the federal and federal member state levels for the immediate application of the provisions on sexual violence included in the 2019 road map and the 2013 joint

communiqué on ending sexual violence in conflict, and for the development of a new national action plan on ending sexual violence in conflict. The Government agreed to incorporate the workplan for the joint communiqué on ending sexual violence in conflict into its national action plan for the implementation of the Somali Women's Charter and its national action plan on women and peace and security, 2021–2025.

67. To assist in the implementation of the 2019 road map, the country task force engaged quarterly with the national working group on children and armed conflict, chaired by the Ministry of Defence, sharing information on trends and patterns of grave violations and discussing ways to end and prevent them, including through the effective implementation of the road map. The country task force held meetings with the Minister of Defence and the Directors General of key ministries to update them on the findings of the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children, particularly when involving the federal and state security forces. On 15 May 2021, a written communication was sent to the Federal Government and the federal member states to raise the issue of violations committed by their respective forces. In the context of this engagement, child protection focal points were appointed in the Somali National Army and in key line ministries, and awareness-raising and capacity-building activities were conducted by the country task force.

68. From February 2021 onward, the country task force reinforced its engagement with the authorities at the federal member state level, more specifically with the ministries of the interior and of women and human rights in Jubbaland, Galmudug and Hirshabelle, to advocate for the establishment of children and armed conflict sub-working groups to effectively implement the child protection commitments undertaken by the Federal Government. In September 2021, such sub-working groups were established in Jubbaland and Hirshabelle, with the assistance of the country task force, which continued also to support the activities of the existing sub-working group in South-West State. The country task force advised the South-West, Jubbaland and Hirshabelle sub-working groups on adopting terms of reference to promote a systemized approach to the implementation of the road map and streamline coordination between the relevant ministries. Terms of reference were endorsed by the South-West State sub-working group in July 2021 and by the Jubbaland and Hirshabelle sub-working groups in September 2021.

69. The country task force also engaged with the Somali Police Force and federal member state police services on the reactivation of the Women and Child Protection Units within police units at the federal and federal member state levels. In September 2020, a gender policy was drafted by the Somali Police Force leadership, with the assistance of the country task force. Once endorsed by the federal and member state authorities, the policy will serve as a framework to ensure that police officers address sexual violence more effectively.

70. The Federal Government conducted screening exercises to ensure that persons below the age of 18 years were not being recruited into the Somali National Army or the Somali Police Force and that children identified in their ranks were released and reintegrated. The country task force supported these exercises through technical advice, awareness-raising and reintegration programming. In 2020, 4,899 Somali National Army soldiers were screened, among whom no children were identified. In 2021, screening exercises were conducted in several Somali National Army sectors, including Jubbaland in March (50 new recruits) and Puntland in May (2,280 soldiers) and July (68 new recruits). During the latter, one child was identified. The general command order to prevent child recruitment and use within the Somali National Army, as well as all grave violations against children during military operations, which had been issued by the Commander of the Somali National Army in 2017, continued to be disseminated.

71. Child protection issues, including follow-up to violations attributed to AMISOM, were discussed in the framework of the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. In addition, mitigating measures to strengthen compliance and decrease the risk of violations of international law were recommended in the context of assessments under the policy for United Nations support to Somali security forces. Overall, the need to strengthen child protection capacities in AMISOM remained.

72. The country task force further delivered assistance programmes to conflict-affected children. Some 1,606 children (1,303 boys, 303 girls) benefited from United Nations-supported community-based reintegration services, including psychosocial assistance, back-to-school support programmes and vocational training. Among these children, 79 per cent were formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, while 21 per cent were vulnerable children from conflict-affected communities. Owing to continued insecurity in most areas of origin, children often remained in reintegration centres for long periods, resulting in increasing unplanned financial expenditure, which made reintegration efforts more challenging and unpredictable.

C. Advocacy and outreach initiatives on child protection

73. Outreach, awareness-raising and capacity-building on child protection remained central to the work of the country task force work and was vigorously supported by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Several media campaigns were implemented in collaboration with the Somali Police Force, the Somali National Army, the Ministry of Defence and the Somali Media Cooperative, as were commemorations of the Day of the African Child and the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers during the reporting period.

74. On 16 June 2021, together with AMISOM, a relaunch of the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign, launched globally in 2019 by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, was conducted in coordination with the federal Ministry of Defence and the ministries of women and human rights development of Jubbaland and South-West State. This followed the dissemination to Somali security forces of the Act to Protect awareness-raising materials throughout 2020.

75. The country task force conducted child protection training for 848 members (804 men, 44 women) of the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces and federal member state police services. Joint child protection training was also organized in collaboration with the European Union Training Mission in Somalia and the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Defence.

76. Together with relevant ministries of federal member states in Jubbaland, Hirshabelle, Puntland, South-West State and Galmudug, capacity-building and outreach activities were conducted with parliamentary committees, civil society organizations, community leaders and internally displaced communities. Child protection community networks composed of community leaders, civil society organizations and the ministries of women and human rights were set up in Baidoa, South-West State, and Kismaayo, Jubbaland. The country task force, in coordination with the Jubbaland Ministry of Justice, conducted capacity-building for the Jubbaland Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee on the monitoring and reporting of grave violations.

77. In addition, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, chaired by Denmark and established in the fourth quarter of 2019, pursued high-level advocacy and resource mobilization for child protection programmes. The Group had also

engaged in advocacy efforts with Somali authorities to advance the implementation of their action plans and the 2019 road map.

78. The country task force adapted its efforts to meet the challenges arising from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout 2020, it engaged with Somali authorities for increased attention to child protection when devising and implementing COVID-19 response measures. Also in 2020, the country task force partnered with civil society organizations in South-West State, Jubbaland and Hirshabelle to conduct COVID-19 awareness-raising through media and community engagement.

VI. Observations and recommendations

79. I am appalled by and strongly condemn the continuing high number of grave violations against children committed by all parties to the conflict in Somalia, particularly the staggering numbers of cases of recruitment and use, abduction, killing and maiming, and sexual violence. I call upon all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. I reiterate the need for parties to protect schools and health-care facilities from attack.

80. I am alarmed by the high numbers of grave violations attributed to Al-Shabaab and the level of insecurity in Somalia linked to Al-Shabaab's activities, which have devastating effects on children. I condemn mass abductions and the targeting of schools for the purpose of recruitment and use and sexual violence. I am also concerned about the high number of violations attributed to clan militias and unidentified perpetrators and about the devastating impact of mines and explosive devices on children.

81. I am concerned by the high number of violations attributed to the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces, including violations attributed to the Somali Police Force, as well as those attributed to regional forces.

82. The renewed clashes between Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a and security forces in Galmudug and their impact on children are a concern. I reiterate my call upon the Federal Government to provide information to the United Nations on the integration of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a into the Somali Federal Defence and Police Forces and encourage the Government to ensure that armed groups integrating into its security forces are screened and that any associated children are released and handed over to civilian child protection actors for reintegration.

83. I welcome the continued engagement by the Federal Government with the United Nations and steps taken to implement the 2012 action plans to end and prevent the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children, and the 2019 road map. The establishment of sub-working groups on children and armed conflict at the federal member state level is a particularly positive development, which should be expanded to all federal member states.

84. I call upon the Federal Government to expedite the full implementation of its child protection commitments, including at the federal member state level, and particularly as they relate to sexual violence. I commend the efforts of the Federal Government in signing the 2019 road map, containing provisions on sexual violence, and in incorporating a national action plan to implement the joint communiqué on ending sexual violence in conflict as part of the women and peace and security architecture and call for the meaningful implementation of the plan and relevant commitments.

85. I am concerned by the continuing high number of children detained for their alleged association with armed groups, the prosecution of minors through military courts, and cases of the death penalty being imposed on children without appropriate age verification, as seen in Puntland. I urge the Federal Government and federal member states to treat children allegedly associated with armed groups primarily as victims, to detain them only as a measure of last resort for the shortest appropriate period of time and to refer them to reintegration programmes. I also call upon the Federal Government to apply the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), which it has endorsed.

86. I urge the Federal Government and federal member states to continue to apply the standard operating procedures for the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups to child protection actors, endorsed in 2014, and to allow child protection actors access to children at every stage of the release and reintegration process. I encourage the adoption of age verification guidelines by the Federal Government for its security forces.

87. I reiterate my call upon the Federal Government to strengthen its legal framework for the protection of children, including by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. I urge the Federal Government to fast-track the endorsement of the child rights bill, with its original provisions of 2019, to endorse the juvenile justice bill and to adopt the original sexual offences bill of 2018. I emphasize the need to ensure that all legislation pertaining to children and sexual violence is in line with the country's international human rights commitments, including regarding the age of majority.

88. I welcome efforts by federal member states to strengthen child protection legislation and policies. I encourage the application of the Juvenile Act in Puntland and the swift adoption of the child rights policy in South-West State and the sexual offences bill and the child protection policy in Jubbaland and encourage similar efforts in other federal member states.

89. I am concerned about the prevalent impunity for grave violations against children and call upon the Federal Government to hold perpetrators accountable in line with international human rights law and standards and ensure remedy for survivors.

90. I pay tribute to AMISOM for its efforts and sacrifices and welcome the continued cooperation between the country task force and AMISOM on the protection of children. I welcome the recent establishment of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia and look forward to continued good collaboration.

91. I call upon donors, including those within the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, created in 2019, to match funds committed by the Peacebuilding Fund and provide additional financial support and technical assistance for sustainable and appropriate reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups and for survivor-centred, age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services and assistance programmes for child survivors, including of sexual violence.

92. I remain alarmed by the devastating impact of the conflict on children in Somalia, which will affect generations to come. The compounding impact on the children of insecurity, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening humanitarian situation is deeply worrying and demands urgent attention.