



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
3 September 2004

Original: English

---

## Fifty-ninth session

Item 103 of the provisional agenda\*

### Promotion and protection of the rights of children

## Comprehensive assessment of the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict\*\*

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/190 of 18 December 2002, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the scope and effectiveness of the United Nations system response to the issue of children and armed conflict.

The assessment focuses on three key issues: the development and application of international standards relating to children affected by armed conflict; the degree of mainstreaming of these issues within the relevant United Nations entities; and the effectiveness of coordination within the United Nations of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict.

Significant progress has been achieved in efforts to strengthen international norms and standards, and Member States have played a significant role in this endeavour. The inclusion of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict on the agendas of the General Assembly and the Security Council has enhanced child protection initiatives. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has helped in raising the profile of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF, as well as non-governmental organizations, has also contributed to the development of a robust framework for norms and standards relating to children affected by armed conflict.

---

\* A/59/150.

\*\* The delay in the submission of the report is due to the need to undertake extensive consultations with the relevant entities of the United Nations system.

The assessment concludes that more needs to be done by the various components of the United Nations, in particular to apply the accepted norms and standards and to put in place an effective monitoring and reporting mechanism. The report outlines recommendations for continued vigorous advocacy; an effective monitoring and reporting system on child rights violations; and enhanced mainstreaming and improved coordination across the United Nations system.

## I. Introduction

1. In 1996, in her landmark study, “Impact of armed conflict on children”,<sup>1</sup> Graça Machel called on the United Nations system to address issues relating to children affected by armed conflict in a comprehensive manner. The report set forth specific recommendations that required changes in the United Nations system’s response to child protection in armed conflict settings.

2. Seven years later, the General Assembly, in resolution 57/190, requested the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the scope and effectiveness of the United Nations system response to the issue of children and armed conflict, including recommendations for strengthening, mainstreaming, integrating and sustaining those activities. The Secretary-General tasked the Monitoring, Evaluation and Consulting Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the Secretariat to undertake this comprehensive assessment and to take into consideration the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including key United Nations organizations, Member States and relevant non-United Nations actors, in order to ensure an inclusive approach and consensus on future actions.<sup>2</sup>

## II. Objectives and methodology

3. In order to assess the scope and effectiveness of the United Nations system’s response to issues relating to children affected by armed conflict and to provide concrete recommendations for improvement, the assessment focused on three key issues:

- (i) The development and application of international norms and standards for children affected by armed conflict, including progress in establishing a monitoring and reporting system for child rights violations in the context of armed conflicts;
- (ii) The degree of mainstreaming of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict within relevant United Nations entities;
- (iii) The effectiveness of United Nations coordination of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict.

4. On each of these three issues, the 1996 Machel report provided guidance for the United Nations system. The present report therefore uses this framework as a baseline from which progress may be measured.

5. Various methods of data collection and analysis were employed to ensure the reliability and validity of findings. The assessment team interviewed more than 200 interlocutors. Twenty United Nations entities in New York and Geneva, more than 25 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and more than 20 Member States were consulted. Two field visits were conducted to meet with United Nations actors on the ground, NGOs, community organizations, and government representatives, as well as with children in conflict or post-conflict situations.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Office of Internal Oversight Services administered a comprehensive survey of United Nations and NGO field personnel concerning children affected by armed conflict, to which responses were received from 28 countries. Extensive documentary research was undertaken to substantiate conclusions. The assessment team consisted of three internal consultants from the Monitoring, Evaluation and Consulting Division of the

Office of Internal Oversight Services and two external expert consultants with substantial experience of children affected by armed conflict, particularly in field operations.

### **III. Findings**

#### **A. The development and application of international norms and standards relating to children affected by armed conflict**

##### **Progress and gaps in norms and standards on child protection**

6. Significant progress has been achieved in efforts to strengthen international norms and standards on child rights protection in situations of armed conflict. Member States have played a key role in this endeavour, both individually and in intergovernmental organs and entities. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has been instrumental in advocating and in raising the profile of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict and in contributing to the establishment of the international normative framework. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as NGOs, has contributed to the development of a robust framework of norms and standards relating to children affected by armed conflict.<sup>4</sup> Particular attention has been paid to improving norms and standards to protect children from recruitment as armed combatants.<sup>5</sup>

7. In addition, concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict are now included on the international community's peace and security agenda. Since August 1999, the Security Council has adopted five resolutions on children and armed conflict.<sup>6</sup> The Security Council has also adopted resolutions requesting the Secretary-General to identify parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in violation of relevant international legal obligations<sup>7</sup> and calling for a cessation of those violations. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and NGOs, among others, believe that such "name and shame" reports are a positive step forward in the application of child protection norms and standards. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and United Nations actors such as UNICEF, as well as NGOs, have been integral to the development of this normative framework for children affected by armed conflict. Two major achievements, the product of close collaboration between the Office of the Special Representative, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNICEF, were the integration of child protection elements into the mandates of peacekeeping missions and the establishment of Child Protection Advisers. The Office of the Special Representative has also worked with regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU) and the Organization of American States (OAS). Prior to these actions, the protection of child rights and welfare in situations of armed conflict was pursued less effectively by the United Nations, mostly through humanitarian channels. This is a significant development which, when coupled with efforts to end impunity for human rights violators, means that concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict are now addressed through political, economic and judicial initiatives, as well as through humanitarian actions.

8. Despite this progress, it should be noted that there are still gaps in the codification of norms and standards intended to protect children in situations of

armed conflict. Although the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict states that armed groups should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18, armed groups cannot formally adhere to the Optional Protocol. Furthermore, parties to the Optional Protocol are able to establish 16 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment. The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 into armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities as a war crime within the Court's jurisdiction. The reference to children under the age of 15 in the Rome Statute is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 38). These discrepancies weaken protection standards for children between 15 and 17 years of age.

### **Application of norms and standards**

9. While the development of international norms and standards to protect children in situations of armed conflict has advanced in recent years, the ultimate responsibility for enforcing compliance with them lies with Member States individually and through the Security Council and other political entities. In its first resolution on children affected by armed conflict, adopted in 1999,<sup>8</sup> the Security Council committed itself "to give special attention to the protection, welfare and rights of children" in its resolutions on specific conflict situations. The inclusion of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict in Security Council resolutions has enhanced child protection initiatives in these conflict situations, in particular empowering the peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone to play a child protection leadership role. However, Security Council resolutions on other countries on its agenda do not include such concerns.

10. Furthermore, Security Council resolutions that call for accountability without specifying the consequences for non-compliance may not always be effective in bringing about the desired results. Imposing bans on arms transfers to parties that use child soldiers, imposing travel bans, freezing assets and excluding child rights violators from future government structures and amnesty possibilities are among the tools the Security Council could use to increase the effectiveness of its work. Finally, children's concerns in countries affected by armed conflict that are not on the Security Council's agenda may not be adequately addressed through United Nations peace and security actions.<sup>9</sup> These omissions are indicative of gaps in the United Nations system's efforts to apply child protection norms and standards in situations of armed conflict.

11. United Nations actors also have important roles to play in promoting the application of child protection norms and standards on the ground. They are able to propose, advocate, negotiate, monitor and report on child rights compliance by parties to a conflict. In general, United Nations operational actors are aware of international child protection norms and standards, but their commitment to promoting them varies considerably. UNICEF, for example, has played a leadership role in addressing non-compliance concerns in the Sudan, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, among other countries, but has been less active in other conflict settings. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) routinely addresses child rights violations with State and non-State actors, as does the United Nations Mission in

Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in Sierra Leone. Elsewhere, however, peacekeeping operations are not pursuing child rights concerns with the same attention or rigour, largely owing to the lack of comparable child protection advisers. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been pursuing respect for relevant child protection norms and standards in some refugee settings, while remaining silent in others.

12. The inconsistencies of operational United Nations actors appear to result from real and perceived conflicts of interest between advocating for compliance with child rights obligations, on the one hand, and maintaining agreements or humanitarian access with Governments and, in some cases, non-State actors, on the other hand. Few United Nations actors have reviewed this question systematically to determine the extent to which engaging in child protection advocacy may have an impact on their operational activities. Such a determination would guide United Nations country team plans and actions on the ground, as well as action at the headquarters level.

13. In situations where United Nations operational actors are unable to pursue advocacy, there would be a continued need for external advocates, who can engage State and non-State actors in accountability and compliance matters more assertively. The position of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was established in 1997, in part to serve as a high-level advocate to overcome obstacles to the application of international child protection norms and standards in situations of armed conflict. Over the past six years, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has raised the profile of concerns relating to children and armed conflict among United Nations entities, Governments and the general public, and played a catalytic role in the Security Council's engagement with respect to children and armed conflict. The requirement of submitting reports to the Security Council and the General Assembly on children and armed conflict has also increased United Nations attention to these concerns. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has dedicated considerable resources to advocacy work, particularly high-profile field missions to situations of armed conflict. For example, in Sri Lanka the Special Representative obtained pledges from parties to the conflict there to honour international child rights norms and standards at a time when United Nations actors on the ground were unable to do so.

14. However, there have also been some shortcomings in the way in which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General addresses issues and concerns relating to children and armed conflict. United Nations actors and NGOs, as well as numerous Member States, have found reports prepared by the Special Representative for the Security Council and General Assembly lacking in appropriate content, analysis and tone. Moreover, despite achievements in Sri Lanka, most missions of the Special Representative to other countries have not resulted in sustained momentum or improvements in child protection. Staff in these countries identified a number of problems undermining the effectiveness of these field missions, including: insufficient discussion with field actors prior to departure; missions that took place too late to be of optimal value in seeking child rights compliance by parties to conflicts; the absence of clarity of agreements and procedures to ensure compliance with commitments; and insufficient communication with field offices after the missions. A majority of field staff interviewed and surveyed as part of this assessment noted that a lack of follow-up

after field visits, as well as on Security Council resolutions, greatly diminishes the impact of these efforts.

15. The broad and vague nature of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict — it does not focus exclusively on advocacy — has hindered effective advocacy. Formal terms of reference for the Special Representative, which would clarify the functions of the position, do not exist. As evidenced by the programmes of work, as well as by donor contributions, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has been involved in a wide range of activities, well beyond what can be considered advocacy — stretching, for example, from “mainstreaming” to “capacity-building”. Such diversification has consequently led to a loss of focus on activities that are necessary to ensure the sustained impact of advocacy.

16. The 1996 Machel report emphasized that “the impact of armed conflict on children must be everyone’s concern and is everyone’s responsibility”, therefore the promotion of child protection norms and standards must not be the exclusive domain of one representative or one specialized agency. Senior United Nations officials have opportunities to raise child protection concerns in high-level settings, including with heads of State and at multi-country summits. Special representatives of the Secretary-General, resident or humanitarian coordinators and country representatives have important roles to play in advocating for the application of child protection norms and standards. One of the most positive instances of involvement by senior United Nations officials in concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where MONUC has been repeatedly seeking compliance with child rights standards from parties to the conflict there, and is effectively promoting the integration of child protection aspects of the Mission’s mandate. Unfortunately, this is one of the few instances identified by the assessment where concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict have been integrated into the roles and responsibilities of senior United Nations officials other than the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF officials. Other senior United Nations officials, such as the Chairpersons of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, as well as the High Commissioner for Human Rights also have important leadership roles to play.

#### **Progress in the development of a monitoring and reporting system for child rights violations**

17. The need to develop a monitoring and reporting system for child rights violations was cited in the 1996 Machel report. Consistency is needed in the standards and methodologies used to identify, document and verify child rights violations, and appropriate mechanisms are required to utilize this information to mobilize public opinion, policy-making, resource allocation and programme interventions. Senior United Nations officials require comparable data to make informed policy decisions. Member States also need reports and strategic analyses to inform their deliberations, resolutions and actions. Since the Machel report, there have been numerous calls to develop a specific monitoring and reporting system for children affected by armed conflict, as existing human rights systems are too broad in focus and too slow in compiling results to address these time-urgent concerns effectively.<sup>10</sup> Reports on children and armed conflict can have an impact on other

issues, such as the protection of civilians, and it will be important that there be overall coherence in monitoring and reporting on such related issues.

18. A number of United Nations and NGO agencies have initiated noteworthy child rights documentation projects in selected conflict-affected countries. In Sri Lanka, for example, UNICEF has facilitated a multi-agency effort to establish a database on child soldier recruitment. The Watch List on Children and Armed Conflict, a coalition of NGOs, also has launched documentation projects in several countries in conflict, and has begun to compile and disseminate global progress reports on child rights violations in particular conflict settings. The UNHCR biennial “Summary updates of Machel study follow-up activities” have been providing valuable information on the situation of refugee children in various parts of the world. These reports are based on annual protection reports submitted by UNHCR country offices. A children affected by armed conflict research consortium established by the Social Science Research Council with the help of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has recently received funding in conjunction with UNICEF to undertake a joint project in four pilot countries that is intended to improve methodologies for the collection of data on children affected by armed conflict. Most recently, the Secretary-General, in his fourth annual report to the Security Council (A/58/546-S/2003/1053 and Corr.1-2) recommended ways to improve monitoring and reporting through further engagement of the Security Council, Governments, regional mechanisms, the International Criminal Court, United Nations country teams, NGOs and civil society groups.

19. Despite these positive initiatives, there is still no systematic monitoring and reporting system in place. Efforts to date remain piecemeal and ad hoc, and information about children and armed conflict is uneven and unreliable. There is no agreement on what to focus on, how to focus on it, what constitutes credible information and how to use it. This lack of agreement renders valid cross-agency and cross-country comparisons impossible. Key decisions are thus being reached without the benefit of reliable or comparable information.

### **Causes for lack of progress**

20. The reason for stalled progress on a monitoring and reporting system for child rights violations has been an inability by key players to define a clear strategy. In 2001, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General began exploring the feasibility of creating a “children’s observatory” which would seek to monitor the conduct of parties to conflict in respect of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict, as well as the parties’ compliance with commitments.<sup>11</sup> However, the Special Representative was unable to secure sufficient support for the development of the observatory because operational United Nations actors and NGOs felt that the proposal did not build sufficiently on existing efforts. And while the Secretary-General’s 2003 annual report to the Security Council (A/58/546-S/2003/1053 and Corr.1-2), prepared by the Special Representative, identifies a range of mechanisms that should engage in child rights compliance efforts, it does not provide a blueprint for developing operational components of a monitoring and reporting system, nor commit to any actions other than engaging in further “consultations” with stakeholders. At the same time, UNICEF and other operational actors have not sufficiently prioritized the key actions needed to address the methodological and operational gaps in monitoring and reporting.



21. There are three issues that must be addressed as first steps in establishing a robust system for monitoring and reporting child rights violations. The first challenge relates to the development of an accepted, standardized and practical methodology to identify, document and verify child rights violations. The second issue is how to establish and coordinate networks of actors on the ground to document child rights concerns throughout war-affected countries. Finally, decisions must be made on the optimal method for disseminating these field findings in order to leverage advocacy action, as well as on concrete measures to bring about the desired result. An effective coordination mechanism is essential in order to advance efforts to establish and implement monitoring and reporting.

## **B. Mainstreaming of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict in strategies, policies and programmes of relevant United Nations actors**

### **Definition of and criteria for mainstreaming**

22. As noted above, the impact of armed conflict on children is everyone's responsibility. Mainstreaming concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict is important for United Nations efforts in this area because one or two actors for example, UNICEF, as the lead agency for children, and/or the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, cannot develop and sustain comprehensive responses to children in situations of armed conflict alone. As demonstrated by the multi-agency response to high-profile allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of refugee and internally displaced women and children in West Africa, United Nations and other actors have recognized the extent to which child protection issues require responses from a broad range of actors.

23. For the purposes of this assessment, mainstreaming was analysed using four criteria:

- Senior management commitment to and promotion of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict
- Integration of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict into policies and strategic plans
- Adequacy of in-house knowledge and expertise to inform policies, strategies and day-to-day operations
- Adequacy of financial support to ensure the above.

Each of these components has been assessed to determine the extent to which United Nations actors have mainstreamed concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict into their respective operations. The degree of mainstreaming of these concerns differs when they are divided into two categories:

- Child survival, which includes health, nutritional and other responses to address children's physical needs, such as for water, sanitation, shelter and medical assistance
- Child protection, which addresses exploitation, sexual violence, child combatants, family separation, and exposure to violence and other traumatic events.

**Assessment of mainstreaming of child survival concerns**

24. Child survival concerns in situations of armed conflict have achieved a higher degree of mainstreaming than child protection when assessed against the four criteria laid out above. The need to keep children alive is a concrete, measurable objective that senior management and field staff of United Nations actors routinely support, as do donor countries, as evidenced in their response to these concerns in the United Nations Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) and bilateral funding proposals. There is a considerable body of health and nutritional expertise within United Nations agencies, and Governments have ministries and institutions of higher education have departments and schools dedicated to furthering research, practice and policy in these areas. While problems arise during efforts to deliver survival-related services to war-affected populations, these problems are usually related to lack of humanitarian access or of timely deployment of qualified staff, and to delays in the delivery of food, medicines and other supplies.

**Assessment of mainstreaming of child protection concerns**

25. In contrast, child protection has not been adequately mainstreamed, as measured by the four criteria above. Senior managers of several United Nations agencies reported that they find child protection more difficult to understand and to translate into programmatic actions than child survival. Part of the problem is that the conceptual and operational dimensions of child protection in situations of armed conflict are still evolving. It is considered that protection in general involves creating an environment conducive to respect for human rights, preventing or alleviating the immediate effects of a specific pattern of abuse and restoring dignified conditions of life through reparation, restitution and rehabilitation.

26. Policies, practices and programmes to create a protective environment for children are progressing but, overall, child protection practices are not as advanced as child survival practices. To date, inter-agency guidelines and programme standards have been promulgated on separated children, child soldiering, gender-based sexual violence and emergency education. While these guidelines and standards will need to continue to be field-tested and modified accordingly over time, they are sufficient to guide these aspects of protection programming for children affected by armed conflict. A remaining gap, however, is an inter-agency consensus on psychosocial responses,<sup>12</sup> which United Nations and NGO staff have identified as a priority concern for the majority of children in situations of armed conflict.

27. United Nations entities have achieved different degrees of child protection mainstreaming. Some have either not engaged in child protection concerns, or their engagement is recent and limited to a few selected conflict situations. They have insufficient senior management commitment and no headquarters expertise to support field efforts or to inform the mainstreaming of child protection concerns into strategic plans, policies or field activities. These entities include the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A welcome step towards mainstreaming child protection concerns was the establishment of the inter-agency working group on the protection of children in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes in August 2001, upon a proposal of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and chaired by the Office of the Special Representative of

the Secretary-General. The guidelines produced by this group should be finalized and circulated without further delay.

28. Some other United Nations actors, having initiated child protection mainstreaming efforts, are either not progressing sufficiently or are losing ground. UNHCR, for example, has strong policies, guidelines and training materials on children affected by armed conflict, such as the “Thematic programme on armed conflict”, but they are not consistently utilized to inform agency practices or to guide implementing partners’ programmes. While child protection expertise has been established or mobilized at UNHCR headquarters, regional and field offices, it has been inconsistent and even reduced or eliminated in the recent restructuring process. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has effectively integrated concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict into its policy work — especially in the context of the protection of civilians and internally displaced persons — but has inconsistently included specific concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict in its senior-level humanitarian advocacy roles, for example those of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the humanitarian coordinators, and in its field-level assessment and sector coordination roles, although these concerns have been raised in the context of the protection of civilians. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has a number of staff with specialized child rights knowledge and experience but lacks a dedicated, senior-level specialist on children affected by armed conflict to ensure these issues are effectively addressed across the Office’s work with treaty bodies, special rapporteurs and procedures, and field presences. Overall, therefore, while there are a few positive examples of child protection field activities, there is an insufficient degree of senior management commitment, in-house expertise and financial support to move child protection effectively into the mainstream of these United Nations actors’ strategic plans, organizational objectives and field work.

29. Perhaps not surprisingly, UNICEF is the only entity that has aligned the degree of senior management commitment, strategic planning, in-house expertise and dedicated funding required to mainstream child protection into its policies, strategies and day-to-day operations. However, even UNICEF requires increased financial resources to fulfil its central role in the United Nations system with regard to children affected by armed conflict. There are a number of obstacles that UNICEF, given its mandate, needs to address more rigorously. These include: facilitation of other United Nations actors’ engagement in child rights concerns, including providing support and technical expertise when necessary; improving capacity at headquarters for more effective policy and programme work relating to children affected by armed conflict;<sup>13</sup> developing and sustaining regional child protection competence beyond the current dedicated capacity-building project; and ensuring adequate and consistent child protection staffing in field locations to coordinate child protection activities on the ground.

### **Reasons for the inadequate level of mainstreaming of child protection**

30. It appears that the root cause for the lack of mainstreaming is a prevailing mindset that dominates the United Nations system: most United Nations actors — particularly senior managers — do not see it as their role or obligation to develop internal capacities and mechanisms that would enable an effective response to protection concerns. Instead, they defer responsibility in this area to UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed

Conflict. UNICEF is the United Nations lead agency for children and therefore perceived to be the natural home for all operational programmes addressing children affected by armed conflict. However, UNICEF alone cannot address all facets of child protection concerns. It does not have the range of specialized knowledge of other United Nations actors to address children's needs comprehensively in all situations, nor does it have sufficient operational capacity and scale to ensure a consistently effective response. Further, the establishment of the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General, with a relatively large support staff, has had the unintended consequence of creating the perception that the incumbent of that position is responsible for all aspects of the issue of children affected by armed conflict within the United Nations system. This is a misperception since the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was designed to be non-operational and therefore precluded from addressing many aspects of the issue of children affected by armed conflict. At the same time, UNICEF and the Special Representative should do more to refute this prevailing mindset.

31. This view that concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict are the exclusive domain of UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has had two unintended consequences. In recent years, child protection has emerged as a distinct discipline in and of itself that requires sufficient in-house expertise to ensure an effective and appropriate response. Informed engagement on the issue of child soldiering, for instance, requires knowledge of international law, national law and customs, guidelines on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and good practice, as well as specific guidelines and programme standards on child soldiers. Engagement on other thematic protection issues, such as separated children, sexual violence and psychosocial programming, necessitates similar knowledge, expertise and experience. Mainstreaming child protection concerns into the United Nations system should enhance, not dilute, international standards and good practices. While a number of United Nations actors can designate focal points on children affected by armed conflict and draw effectively on the child protection expertise of UNICEF and NGOs — such as members of the Save the Children Alliance — to address the issue of mainstreaming, some key United Nations organizations must do more to mainstream child protection effectively into their specific policies, strategies and day-to-day operations.

32. The second consequence of the prevailing perception that concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict are the exclusive domain of UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has been insufficient funding for initiatives in this area when requested by other United Nations actors. Regrettably, requests by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for funding of child protection initiatives, such as Child Protection Advisers in peacekeeping operations, have not been fully met.

33. An analysis of the CAP from 2000 to 2002 shows that donors did not fund projects for children affected by armed conflict — regardless of the requesting agency — at the same level of funding as other projects. On average, donors provided 73 per cent of funding requested for all projects in the CAP, as compared to only 60 per cent of funding requested for projects for children affected by armed conflict over the same period. Projects focusing on child protection received less funding than child survival projects. Furthermore, 60 per cent of the United Nations and NGO staff surveyed in 28 countries affected by conflict indicated that funding levels were insufficient to meet even the most basic protection needs of children in

these situations. It may be difficult to demonstrate the impact of projects for children affected by armed conflict on the lives of children and this could explain the gap in funding such projects. However, if mainstreaming is to be successful, funding for such projects must be increased considerably. The agenda for children affected by armed conflict should also be supported through development programmes, especially those aimed at crisis prevention and recovery.

### **C. The effectiveness of coordination of United Nations actors in responding to issues relating to children affected by armed conflict**

#### **Headquarters-level coordination**

34. A key task at the headquarters level is to develop system-wide strategies and coordination mechanisms that would harmonize the functioning of different actors addressing given concerns. Strategies should identify critical issues, prioritize actions to address them and clarify the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors. It will also be essential that the necessary steps be taken to implement the strategies and translate them into practice without delay.

35. The 1996 Machel report provided the first comprehensive strategy for moving concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict forward within the United Nations system. There has been insufficient progress in implementing these recommendations, partly due to the lack of clarity concerning responsibility for coordinating these concerns. The mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General includes fostering international cooperation and contributing to coordination of efforts,<sup>14</sup> whereas UNICEF is the designated lead United Nations actor for children. Unfortunately, tensions have resulted in fragmented efforts. UNICEF does not always facilitate the involvement of other actors in concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict and should take concrete steps to change this situation. While the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General earlier made efforts to promote cooperation, it has not been able to develop close collaborative relationships with some of the key United Nations actors and NGOs in the area of children affected by armed conflict. In particular, there has been considerable dissatisfaction with the process led by the Special Representative in preparing annual reports on children affected by armed conflict to the General Assembly and the Security Council. This is particularly unfortunate as the preparation of these reports has been one of the few times key United Nations and NGO actors are brought together on concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict. Clarification of roles and responsibilities in this area and facilitative leadership are required to regain the vision and momentum established by the Machel report process.

36. A second key task for better coordination at the headquarters level is the development of inter-agency policies, principles and advocacy strategies to move issues forward within the United Nations system. Coordination groups on internally displaced persons, gender, sexual exploitation, mine action and the protection of civilians have been effective in promoting inter-agency consensus on these concerns. The absence of a formal coordination mechanism is considered to have contributed to a lack of systematic and coordinated responses to the issues relating to children affected by armed conflict.

37. At the same time, informal United Nations and NGO working groups have been organized to collaborate on a range of important initiatives. Of particular note are the inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children developed by UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs; the Action for the Rights of Children, initiated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Save the Children Alliance and involving other actors; and the Cape Town principles on child soldiers, facilitated by UNICEF and NGOs. The impact of these efforts, however, might be enhanced by their endorsement and dissemination as official inter-agency policies, principles and practices.

### **Field-level coordination**

38. Successful field-level coordination involves identifying, prioritizing and responding to concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict in a manner that avoids duplication and ensures comprehensive coverage of affected children. It also includes promotion of programme standards and good practice and efficient use of donor funding. NGOs, which often implement the majority of field-based programmes and have considerable expertise in the area of children affected by armed conflict, are key actors and thus critical components of a coordinated response.

39. Field-level coordination was found to be inconsistent. For example, over 60 per cent of respondents to the field survey in the assessment gave poor ratings to United Nations coordination of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict on the ground. Interviews confirmed this finding. The most common problems associated with United Nations field-level coordination were determined to be the lack of United Nations actors' commitment to concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict; the lack of qualified child protection staff; insufficient field-level staffing to coordinate these concerns; the exclusion of NGOs from planning processes; and insufficient donor support for programmes for children affected by armed conflict.

40. In Sri Lanka, United Nations coordination of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict was found to be effective, with UNICEF playing a catalytic role in a United Nations country team that actively engages in these concerns, and working well with NGOs. Duplication has been avoided and considerable harmonization of efforts is being achieved. The country team has developed a comprehensive plan of action for children affected by armed conflict and is serving as an effective and inclusive coordination mechanism. It actively prioritizes concerns, ensures adequate coverage and promotes programme standards and good practice.

41. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the placement of MONUC child protection advisers in field locations was found to be ensuring an active United Nations protection presence on the ground. Given the decentralized nature of this conflict, as well as the size of the country, the deployment of child protection advisers to various locations is particularly essential for effective coordination. However, there were some instances where lack of proper hand-over arrangements between actors resulted in protection failures. In these cases, MONUC actions or civil society advocacy led to the temporary release of small groups of child soldiers,

who were re-recruited because there were no other United Nations or NGO actors available to receive them.

42. Within the United Nations system, resident coordinators or humanitarian coordinators are responsible for ensuring that coordination mechanisms are in place at the country level. These senior United Nations representatives are not always aware of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict or of their responsibilities with regard to them. Despite the fact that child rights violations may be widespread and well publicized, these issues may not always feature in pre-assignment briefings. For example, it is regrettable that a key opportunity was missed to integrate child protection concerns into the revision of terms of reference for humanitarian coordinators during their 2003 annual retreat. This is especially striking as the revised terms of reference for humanitarian coordinators now include responsibility for internally displaced persons, gender, and sexual exploitation and violence. In spite of the recommendations in the 1996 Machel report, concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict are not included in the terms of reference for resident coordinators and relevant special representatives of the Secretary-General.

43. The regional coordinators/humanitarian coordinators are responsible for the development of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan, the part of the CAP that identifies priorities and proposes strategies to address them. An analysis of the 2000 to 2002 Common Humanitarian Action Plans for nine situations, showed a general improvement in the degree to which concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict were included in inter-agency strategies over the course of those three years. However, four of the nine action plans reviewed demonstrate extremely limited content regarding such concerns. As these action plans are a key United Nations system tool in developing strategies and coordinated programmes, significant effort is required to make sure concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict are consistently identified and prioritized in them.

#### **Coordination between headquarters and the field**

44. Headquarters/field coordination was examined from the perspective of a smooth flow of communications on concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict and harmonization of field/headquarters activities and initiatives. Member States also emphasized the need for coordinated information exchange and reporting. While the need for timely and relevant information about concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict was underscored, there was a clear preference for consolidated and analytical United Nations reporting. In this regard, the joint input from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF to the Security Council's discussions on Liberia can be considered a positive development.

45. From the field perspective, United Nations country-based staff identified the lack of follow-up on advocacy initiatives as a significant coordination concern. United Nations country-based staff pointed out that there was often no concrete plan or direction as to how to follow up effectively on Security Council resolutions or on child protection commitments secured by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The lack of child protection expertise in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at Headquarters, as well as insufficient feedback from other relevant United Nations entities, has meant that Child Protection Advisers in

field operations are not receiving proper guidance and support. It is important that the proposed internal best practice assessment of the experience with child protection advisers take place urgently.

#### **IV. Recommendations to strengthen the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict**

46. This assessment has highlighted the progress and remaining systemic shortcomings of the United Nations system's response to children affected by armed conflict. The recommendations for improving and sustaining efforts for children affected by armed conflict are grouped into four categories, which constitute the medium-term strategic priorities for the United Nations system to improve its response to children affected by armed conflict:

- (a) Continued vigorous advocacy for children affected by armed conflict;
- (b) An effective and credible monitoring and reporting system on child rights violations;
- (c) Enhanced mainstreaming of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict across the United Nations system;
- (d) Improved coordination of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict across the United Nations system.

47. These recommendations would constitute transitional measures towards more firmly institutionalizing United Nations system efforts for children affected by armed conflict. Following another assessment after a period of perhaps three years, consideration could be given to consolidating these actions for children affected by armed conflict within UNICEF.

##### **A. Continued vigorous advocacy for children affected by armed conflict**

48. There is a continued need for a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict as an independent advocate reporting directly to the Secretary-General, but also for the adoption of appropriate mechanisms for measurement of progress against benchmarks established each year.

49. The mandated functions of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict should be clearly laid out in terms of reference, focusing on the following:

- Integrating children's rights and concerns into the United Nations peace and security, humanitarian and development agendas throughout all phases of conflict prevention, peace-building, peacemaking and peacekeeping activities
- Unblocking political impasses to secure commitments from political actors on child protection at the national and regional levels and ensuring adequate follow-up to these commitments



- Ensuring the inclusion of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict in all relevant reports submitted to the Security Council by the Secretary-General
- Reporting child rights violations to relevant entities, for example the Secretary-General, the Security Council, Governments and regional mechanisms, and advocating the inclusion in resolutions of appropriate measures, for example sanctions, for actors who are violating norms and standards relating to children affected by armed conflict
- Leading a collaborative process to produce the annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children affected by armed conflict. The report would focus on progress in the application of norms and standards relating to children affected by armed conflict, including reporting on child rights violations in situations of conflict; suggestions for measures to ensure compliance with norms and standards; and high-level analysis of trends concerning children affected by armed conflict, with recommendations for improvements in the United Nations system response, in particular suggestions on how United Nations peace and security mechanisms can respond better to children affected by armed conflict and make progress on the development of a monitoring and reporting system for child rights violations
- Producing an annual report to the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, using inputs from key United Nations actors. The report would include a high-level analytical assessment of: the state of children affected by armed conflict in all conflict situations (i.e., not just countries on the Security Council's agenda); progress in the United Nations system's advocacy, mainstreaming and coordination efforts on issues relating to children affected by armed conflict; and prioritized next steps for the United Nations system in improving its response to children affected by armed conflict.
- Providing proactive advocacy support to the Secretary-General, heads of agencies, special representatives, regional/humanitarian coordinators and other high-level United Nations officials, primarily through inter-agency committees such as the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security and the Senior Management Group, and through annual meetings of regional coordinators or humanitarian coordinators
- Co-chairing the coordination mechanism to be set up at Headquarters on children affected by armed conflict
- Maintaining high-profile public awareness of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict, as required to achieve political advocacy objectives, including cooperation with the Department of Public Information.

50. The advocacy and reporting activities of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children affected by armed conflict should be supported by a streamlined staff of four professionals. In addition to the post of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, there should be a Senior Adviser; two Professional staff who would be responsible for day-to-day relations with United Nations entities and NGOs, as well as for assisting in the preparation of reports; and one Professional staff member who would be responsible for outreach and public information. In addition, there would be a total of three support staff. The Office of the Special Representative should also be provided with adequate resources to cover

field visits and other advocacy trips, consultancies and other office operations, commensurate with the streamlined structure and functions. After a period of three years, the continued need for a separate high-level advocate should be reviewed and recommendations submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration.

51. It is recommended that gaps in the application of norms and standards should be addressed by the key components of the United Nations system. Particular attention should be focused on the following aspects:

- The identification of appropriate bilateral, multilateral and regional initiatives to address the political, economic and legal dimensions of child rights and welfare concerns in countries not on the Security Council's agenda.
- Discussions to establish global policy and practice concerning child protection advocacy in order for advocacy to assume a stronger role in the future. The advocacy roles of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the High Commissioner for Human Rights should be more systematically resorted to in support of concerns and issues relating to children affected by armed conflict.
- Development actions by United Nations country teams, with indications as to when the intervention of external advocates, such as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, would be of benefit.

## **B. Operationalization of a monitoring and reporting system on child rights violations**

52. A robust monitoring and reporting system for child rights violations in conflict situations should be developed. This would require three distinct steps:

- (i) Developing an accepted, standardized and practical methodology to identify, document and verify child rights violations;
- (ii) Setting up and coordinating networks of actors on the ground to document child rights concerns;
- (iii) Establishing responsibilities and procedures for disseminating and utilizing the information.

53. The first step in operationalizing a monitoring and reporting system is to establish a time-limited project with clearly delineated objectives and deliverables. It is recommended that UNICEF, working with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other relevant United Nations entities, as well as with key NGO networks (such as the Watch List on Children and Armed Conflict), establish and facilitate an inter-agency task force to seek consensus on standard practices and approaches in documenting child rights violations in the field. Beginning immediately, the task force should undertake this time-limited project by:

- Holding a series of consultations with other United Nations and NGO actors at the field, regional and headquarters levels to identify state-of-the-art practices and approaches
- Engaging a small team of academic specialists to ensure methodologies that result from this initiative are objective, rigorous and credible

- Submitting the agreed-upon methodologies to the Headquarters coordination mechanism for endorsement and follow-up actions
- Reporting on progress being made in the Secretary-General's annual report to the Security Council on issues relating to children affected by armed conflict
- Completing the project within 12 to 18 months, supported by voluntary funding
- Reconvening subsequently on an annual basis to review and revise the methodologies.

54. The second step is to create networks whose members identify and document child rights concerns utilizing the agreed-upon methodologies. It is recommended that, simultaneously with the process outlined above, the following steps be taken:

- UNICEF and an operational, child-focused NGO network (such as the Save the Children Alliance) engage in an initiative to develop, in countries affected by armed conflict, field- and national-level child protection networks where they do not currently exist. Such child protection networks should consist of relevant United Nations actors, NGOs and civil society groups on the ground and should be organized in all relevant field situations as a standard component of emergency response operations.
- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General or the Regional Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator should work with UNICEF on the ground to ensure these mechanisms are established in all relevant field-based locations throughout a given country affected by armed conflict.
- Given the obstacles posed by confidentiality rules, agreements should be reached on information-sharing between United Nations actors — particularly peacekeeping missions — and operational NGOs involved in child protection activities.
- The national UNICEF-NGO partnership should establish clear progress indicators and benchmarks to monitor operational effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting system on the ground. Benchmarks and indicators should include: regularity of reporting, consistency in the use of set standards and comprehensiveness of coverage.
- Efforts to establish these national and field networks should begin immediately in all current conflict situations and be completed within the same 12-to-18-month time frame in which the standard practices and approaches in documenting child rights violations are being developed. The national UNICEF-NGO partnership should report progress to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for inclusion in the Secretary-General's annual report to the Security Council on issues relating to children affected by armed conflict. Voluntary contributions should be sought for these efforts as well.

55. The third step in operationalizing a monitoring and reporting system is to collate and disseminate information from the field level. In this regard, it is recommended that the following steps be taken:

- The UNICEF-NGO network described above is charged with collating, prioritizing and synthesizing information collected from various field locations and with developing countrywide reports.
- Resident or humanitarian coordinators assume responsibility for dissemination of countrywide reports within the United Nations system at the country level.
- United Nations country teams ensure a response to urgent child rights concerns, including calling on an advocate such as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as required, and use the information to follow up on abuses and violations identified and commitments made by all parties concerned, as stipulated in Security Council resolution 1539 (2004).
- NGOs continue to strengthen and utilize their own independent information dissemination channels.
- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General utilizes United Nations and independent reports for advocacy with international and regional bodies, Governments and non-State parties.

**C. Enhanced mainstreaming of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict across the United Nations system**

56. In order to enhance the mainstreaming of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict across the United Nations system, it is recommended that all relevant United Nations entities incorporate these concerns in the planning and implementation of their activities. Benchmarks to track progress in mainstreaming concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict should also be established and this progress should be monitored and reported to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who in turn should include these findings in annual reports to the General Assembly. In carrying out their responsibilities, executive heads should ensure that their organizations:

- Develop an agency-wide action plan for incorporating a child protection dimension in work programmes at the headquarters and field levels
- Provide guidance and support to headquarters offices and field personnel on child protection issues and the incorporation of child protection concerns in their activities
- Document and share best practices and lessons learned on child protection issues at headquarters and in the field
- Ensure flow of information between headquarters and the field with regard to child protection concerns.

57. To accomplish more effective mainstreaming, as described above, it is recommended that key agencies appoint a senior officer as focal point at headquarters for children affected by armed conflict. It is recommended that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations establish a full-time child protection expert position to provide guidance to staff assigned to peacekeeping missions and to advance mainstreaming at Headquarters. OHCHR should consider making the current part-time focal point for children affected by armed conflict into a dedicated, full-time position. These positions should be created for an initial period of three

years. The child protection experts and focal points at headquarters would support the efforts to mainstream concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict into policy and programme activities, and liaise with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF, as appropriate.

58. While it is necessary for key United Nations entities to mainstream concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict as a means of improving the response to the issue of children affected by armed conflict, UNICEF should be at the forefront in providing leadership and expertise on children affected by armed conflict for the United Nations system. In order to improve the child protection capacity of UNICEF to fulfil its current roles with regard to issues relating to children affected by armed conflict and to assume additional responsibilities outlined earlier in the present report, it is recommended that an appropriate number of additional posts be established in the relevant sections at UNICEF headquarters. The purpose would be to reinforce work in the key areas of psychosocial programming and child soldier demobilization and reintegration; to contribute to UNICEF monitoring and reporting efforts; to bolster inter-agency cooperation; and to provide support and expertise for other United Nations system actors on matters relating to children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF should take immediate steps to determine the number of additional posts required, other measures to increase capacity at various levels, and the resource implications.

59. UNICEF should strengthen its existing protection capacities to ensure an adequate response to concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict and — in the longer term — to provide stronger support and guidance to other United Nations actors on the ground, as well as at headquarters. UNICEF should also work with relevant United Nations system mechanisms (the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security and the United Nations Development Group/the regional coordinator system) to mainstream leadership and advocacy roles for the protection of children affected by armed conflict into the responsibilities and terms of reference of regional/humanitarian coordinators and special representatives of the Secretary-General.

60. Furthermore, it is recommended that the following specific actions be taken by individual United Nations actors:

- United Nations actors should pursue ways to increase voluntary contributions for field programmes for children affected by armed conflict, given that projects in this area are typically funded to a lesser degree than other projects.
- The Emergency Relief Coordinator should ensure that concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict are systematically included in emergency assessments led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as facilitating the incorporation of child protection requirements in CAPs.
- OHCHR should finalize and adopt the child rights policy drafted for the Office's work. The senior management of OHCHR should delineate a three-year strategy and work plan of priority activities to be undertaken internally to improve the Office's work on children in armed conflict.
- UNDP should ensure that children's concerns are integrated into its crisis prevention, early warning and conflict resolution activities, as well as its

efforts to bridge the gap between emergency relief and long-term development, notably in juvenile justice projects, as required.

- UNESCO should continue to promote the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. UNESCO also should provide technical support for evaluations, assessments and identification of good practice.
- UNHCR should ensure that qualified child specialists are deployed in the early phases of emergency response, as called for in the 1996 Machel report. UNHCR should also reverse its recent trend of downgrading refugee children coordination and increase its field-level child protection staffing, training efforts and budgets.
- The World Food Programme (WFP) should prioritize and target food aid to support health, education and other activities for children affected by armed conflict, especially for adolescents and former child combatants.

61. Another key factor for successful mainstreaming is the commitment of senior management in the United Nations. It is recommended that the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict jointly convene a meeting of the principals of the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OHCHR, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of Legal Affairs, UNDP, UNHCR and WFP twice a year to review the progress being made in mainstreaming and coordination. It is further recommended that the Secretary-General meet annually with senior managers of all relevant United Nations entities to discuss the progress made in mainstreaming concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict. This meeting would act as the primary mechanism to ensure accountability for serious and visible commitment to the issue, while also affording the opportunity for United Nations actors to update the Secretary-General on the broader United Nations system's strategy on children affected by armed conflict and to seek his support on issues requiring his direct involvement and guidance.

#### **D. More effective coordination across the United Nations system of issues relating to children affected by armed conflict**

62. Given the lack of a regular, formal coordination mechanism at Headquarters, it is recommended that the Secretary-General establish an appropriate coordination mechanism on children affected by armed conflict. A group should be set up, co-chaired by UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and should include representatives of the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OHCHR, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of Legal Affairs, UNDP, UNHCR and WFP. The group would also hold meetings with representatives of relevant NGOs, whenever appropriate. The group would provide reports to the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who would be responsible for briefing the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security.

63. The group would focus on the following key responsibilities:

- Developing an overarching strategy and prioritized action plan for incorporating concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict in the work of the United Nations system
- Ensuring information exchange between United Nations actors and NGOs on issues relating to children affected by armed conflict
- Establishing inter-agency policies and operational guidelines, including advocacy strategies, on children affected by armed conflict and submitting relevant recommendations and conclusions to the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs for executive decisions
- Ensuring technical competence and enhanced learning from experience
- Identifying gaps in advocacy — particularly political impasses on child protection — and determining an appropriate response, for example requesting a field mission by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to unblock political obstacles
- Identifying gaps in the United Nations system response to children affected by armed conflict and bringing them to the attention of the relevant agencies/coordinating mechanisms
- Providing input into the annual reports of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights
- Preparing, under the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council.

64. To improve coordination in the field, it is recommended that UNICEF, working together with an operational child-focused NGO network (such as the Save the Children Alliance), lead the development of field- and national-level child protection networks in countries affected by armed conflict. A key function of these networks will be monitoring and reporting, but also coordination and ensuring coverage of programmatic concerns. Regional/humanitarian coordinators and special representatives of the Secretary-General should more consistently set up country-level coordinating mechanisms and provide overall leadership on child protection issues.

65. It has been demonstrated that field-level coordination was successful when the United Nations country team was committed to concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict, United Nations actors collaborated actively with NGOs and sufficient funding was available. It is, therefore, recommended that coordination in the field be strengthened under the United Nations country team, with UNICEF providing the necessary expertise. Field-level coordination should focus on the following key areas:

- Developing a countrywide child protection strategy that delineates the roles of each actor during each stage of an emergency situation
- Developing strategies in conjunction with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to follow up on Security Council resolutions and other commitments to protecting the rights of children affected by armed conflict

- Providing input for the working group to develop operational guidelines and promoting their application in the field
- Sharing information between United Nations agencies and with NGOs for coordinated decision-making on the issue of children affected by armed conflict
- Facilitating the establishment of coordinating mechanisms at the sub-country/field office level
- Collating, prioritizing and synthesizing information collected from various field locations on child rights violations and developing and disseminating countrywide reports
- Coordinating approaches for a fund-raising strategy particularly with respect to the CAP.

## V. Conclusions

66. While it has taken longer than originally anticipated, I believe that the present report provides the General Assembly with a comprehensive and frank assessment of the United Nations system's response to the issue of children and armed conflict. It recognizes the important steps taken in the development of international norms and standards since the landmark study by Graça Machel in 1996. I would like to express my appreciation for the excellent and thorough work of the assessment team, which has also been welcomed by the relevant entities of the United Nations which were consulted, both during the assessment and after the report had been submitted to me.

67. The General Assembly has demonstrated its commitment to the plight of children caught up in situations of armed conflict by renewing the mandate of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and providing guidance to the United Nations system during its annual review of progress in the implementation of the mandate. The Security Council has also provided leadership by adopting five resolutions to date firmly establishing concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict on the international community's peace and security agenda. The very important measures adopted recently under resolution 1539 (2004) will lead to the development of an effective monitoring and reporting system. The resolution also provides clear guidance on the role that the United Nations country teams should play in this regard. The recommendations made in the present assessment offer very concrete and practicable means of achieving a robust monitoring and reporting mechanism. I should also like to express appreciation for the important role of other United Nations bodies, as well as that of NGOs, in support of this important issue.

68. The organizations of the United Nations system have also made commendable efforts and there has been significant progress in the protection of children in situations of armed conflict since 1996. While some organizations have played direct roles, a number of departments, agencies, funds and programmes have been implementing programmes that benefit children in armed conflict situations indirectly. Nonetheless, it is evident that much more can and should be done by all parts of the system at all levels, both in the field and at Headquarters. I and my senior colleagues are determined to ensure that the recommendations contained in



this report are implemented without delay so that the United Nations can contribute to the application of the protection norms and standards which have been developed. Particular attention will have to be devoted to developing and implementing an effective monitoring and reporting system. Greater efforts also need to be made to follow up on reported violations. The ultimate responsibility for enforcing compliance lies with Member States and I call on the General Assembly and on the Security Council to continue to give priority attention to this important issue in the coming years.

69. There is no single entity that can be expected to respond to the many challenges facing children in situations of armed conflict. I welcome, therefore, the recommendations that are intended to strengthen the mainstreaming of concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict within the relevant United Nations system organizations and departments. I fully agree that we need to make more determined efforts to ensure that our work in this area is well coordinated and that measurable concrete results are achieved. The Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and other entities will have important and complementary roles to play, as outlined in the report. The assessment has confirmed the benefit of an independent advocate for children and armed conflict reporting directly to me. It is essential that the Office focus its future activities on the core functions of the mandate established by the General Assembly. Taking into consideration the findings and recommendations of the assessment, I have decided to implement the streamlined structure of the Office with immediate effect. It is crucial that the Office collaborate with other components of the United Nations system and that the products of its endeavours are based on joint efforts, including with relevant NGOs where appropriate.

70. I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all Member States who have supported the Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict through generous financial contributions on a voluntary basis since its inception. The achievements registered so far would not have been possible without the significant resources that have been made available in past years. More recently, donors have not been contributing funds and the available resources are expected to be exhausted by the end of 2004. Now that the assessment it had requested has been submitted, the General Assembly may wish to consider the best means of financial support for the Office, including the authorization of funds from the regular budget, which it was considering during its fifty-eighth session.

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> A/51/306, "Impact of armed conflict on children; report of the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Machel, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157", 26 August 1996. The report is hereafter referred to as the "1996 Machel report".

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, the terms United Nations entities or United Nations actors will be used to refer to United Nations programmes, funds, specialized agencies, other entities and Secretariat offices and departments.

<sup>3</sup> The selection of Sri Lanka and the Democratic Republic of the Congo as assessment locations was determined in consultation with UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

<sup>4</sup> Inter alia, the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the 1999 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in 2000 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, establishing 18 as the minimum age for the participation of children in conflict. The 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the 1999 International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour also address child soldiering.

<sup>6</sup> Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003) and 1539 (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Security Council resolutions 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003) and 1539 (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Security Council resolution 1261 (1999).

<sup>9</sup> Some progress has been made in bringing concerns relating to children affected by armed conflict to the attention of political entities outside of the Security Council, particularly those with regional mechanisms. For example, efforts led by the Government of Canada with ECOWAS in 1999 led to the April 2000 Accra Declaration on War-Affected Children in West Africa. Save the Children Sweden, UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict have continued to build on this momentum with, for example, a regional military training initiative and a "Peer Review Summit". In addition to frequent consultations with the leadership of the European Parliament, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General also proposed several provisions for child protection and post-conflict rehabilitation that were included in the African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Union Partnership Agreement in 2000. Most recently, UNICEF convened two meetings with EU General Affairs Council representatives to provide input into the "EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict", adopted in December 2003. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Human Rights Watch and other NGOs have also been key participants in these meetings and other advocacy efforts with EU mechanisms.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, paragraphs 240 and 284 of the 1996 Machel report (A/51/306); "The Machel Review, 1996-2000" (A/55/749, annex); and the "Winnipeg Agenda for War-Affected Children" (A/55/467-S/2000/973, annex).

<sup>11</sup> See A/56/342-S/2001/852, para. 21.

<sup>12</sup> The term "psychosocial" is meant to capture the dynamic relationship between psychological and social effects of armed conflict on children, which together have profound effects on child development and well-being. "Psychological effects" are those which affect emotions, behaviour, memory and learning. "Social effects" refer to altered relationships caused by death, separation, family and community breakdown and damage to social values and customary practices.

<sup>13</sup> Improved headquarters capacity is particularly required in the areas of: psychosocial programming; child soldier demobilization and reintegration; and monitoring and reporting.

<sup>14</sup> See General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996.