



Security Council

Distr.: General
31 December 2020

Original: English

Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Conclusions on children and armed conflict in the Philippines

1. During a closed videoconference held on 26 August 2020, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict examined the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Philippines ([S/2020/777](#)), covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019, which was introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed the Working Group.
2. The members of the Working Group welcomed the report of the Secretary-General, submitted in accordance with Security Council resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), and took note of the analysis and recommendations contained therein.
3. The members of the Working Group welcomed the enactment of the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act, which incorporates the provisions of Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, as well as guidelines on monitoring and reporting and on the signing of implementing rules and regulations, into national legislation. They commended the Government of the Philippines for integrating therein gender-sensitive provisions, which include guarantees for access to education for girls in situations of armed conflict. They welcomed the promulgation of the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in July 2018, a result of the peace process between the Government of the Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the majority faction of the Moro National Liberation Front. The members of the Working Group welcomed the revival of peace talks between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the Government. They condemned all instances of the six grave violations committed against children in the context of armed conflict in the Philippines, including those affecting children from indigenous communities in Davao, Northern Mindanao and Caraga. They expressed their concern about the increase in verified violations compared with the number of such violations in the previous reporting period. They underlined the importance of integrating child protection issues into peace processes, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children allegedly associated with armed groups, as well as of provisions on the rights and well-being of children. They underlined the importance



of addressing impunity by ensuring that all perpetrators of violations and abuses are brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay.

4. Further to the meeting, and subject to and consistent with applicable international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), the Working Group agreed to the direct action set out below.

Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group

5. The Working Group agreed to address a message to the following parties through a public statement by its Chair:

To all parties to the armed conflict in the Philippines

(a) Expressing grave concern at, and its strongest condemnation of, the violations and abuses that continue to be committed against children in the Philippines and urging all parties to immediately end and prevent all violations involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access and to comply with their obligations under international law;

(b) Calling upon all parties to further implement the previous conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines ([S/AC.51/2008/10](#), [S/AC.51/2010/5](#), [S/AC.51/2014/1](#) and [S/AC.51/2017/4](#));

(c) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict and stressing that all perpetrators must be brought to justice and held accountable without undue delay, including through timely, systematic, impartial and independent investigations and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction through appropriate justice mechanisms to ensure that all victims have access to justice and to the medical and support services that they need;

(d) Noting with concern that access constraints for the country task force to remote conflict-affected areas, notably the Sulu Archipelago, during the reporting period presented challenges to the verification of the six grave violations against children and that, therefore, the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Philippines ([S/2020/777](#)) does not reflect the full impact of armed conflict on children in the Philippines;

(e) Noting with concern the increase in instances of the six grave violations compared with those in the previous reporting period, including as a result of the Marawi siege of 2017, as well as the increased number of children detained by Government security forces for alleged association with armed groups;

(f) Condemning the recruitment and use of children for combat and support roles, urging all parties to immediately and without conditions release all children associated with them and further urging them to end and prevent recruitment and use of children under 18 years of age in line with their obligations as set out in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as applicable;

(g) Expressing concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed forces and armed groups, urging all parties to the armed conflict to consider children associated with armed groups, including those who may have committed crimes, primarily as victims of recruitment and use, to work to ensure their release and support their full reintegration through specialized child protection, including family- and community-based reintegration programmes, and including access to health care, psychosocial support and education

programmes, as well as to raise awareness and work with communities to avoid stigmatization of such children and facilitate their return and to ensure that prosecution of children is carried out with respect for the rights of the child, that detention should be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and that alternatives to detention should be prioritized, in line with international law, and further urging the Government to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol thereto on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

(h) Expressing deep concern at the killing and maiming of children, including those resulting from attacks against communities, crossfire, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, urging all parties to take measures to prevent and end such killing and maiming and calling upon parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined therein;

(i) Expressing deep concern about both verified and unverified incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children, strongly urging all parties to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children and stressing the importance of accountability for those who commit sexual and gender-based violence against children and of ensuring access to non-discriminatory and comprehensive specialized services, including psychosocial, health, legal and livelihood support and services, for survivors of sexual violence;

(j) Strongly condemning the increase in attacks on schools and hospitals, in violation of international law and affecting the access to high-quality education of at least 20,000 children, calling upon all parties to comply with applicable international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals, including their personnel, as such, and to end and prevent disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks or threats of attacks against those institutions and their personnel, as well as the military use of schools and hospitals, in violation of applicable international law, and noting the effect that attacks on schools and their use can have on the enjoyment of the right to education;

(k) Strongly condemning the abduction of children, including for recruitment and use and other forms of exploitation, and calling upon all concerned parties to cease the abduction of children and immediately release all abducted children;

(l) Encouraging further action to ensure humanitarian access and the elimination of violence and the threat of violence against humanitarian personnel and calling upon all parties to allow and facilitate, in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access, consistent with United Nations guiding principles for humanitarian assistance as well as the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, to respect the exclusively humanitarian nature and impartiality of humanitarian aid and to respect the work of all United Nations humanitarian agencies and their humanitarian partners, without adverse distinction;

(m) Expressing deep concern about the scale of the six grave violations affecting children from indigenous communities in the context of conflict between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the New People's Army, about the increased involvement of paramilitary groups and about the renewed and intensified conflict during the reporting period, leading to displacement that affected mostly remote indigenous communities, notably in Davao, Northern Mindanao and Caraga;

(n) Encouraging the resumption of peace negotiations between the Government and armed groups, and urging the parties to include child protection

issues in respective peace talks with the support of the United Nations and guided by, inter alia, the *Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*;

(o) Welcoming the inauguration of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, marking the culmination of the peace process between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and calling upon the Authority to continue to implement the peace agreement and to use the lessons learned and best practices of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to prevent violations against children;

(p) Calling upon all parties who have not yet done so to enhance their engagement with the United Nations to develop and adopt appropriate standard operating procedures for the release and reintegration of children associated with parties to the conflict and to cooperate with civilian child protection actors to facilitate their release and reintegration into their communities, and underlining that family- and community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to the conflict is essential to provide a future to these children and their families, as well as to prevent the risks of re-recruitment in violation of international law;

To the Government of the Philippines

(q) Stressing the primary role of the Government in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict in the Philippines, and recalling that the Philippines is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

(r) Welcoming the promulgation of the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act in January 2019 and the signing of the implementing rules and regulations in June 2019, and urging the Government to swiftly implement those domestic legal obligations and to reinforce the protection of children, including by taking preventive measures and ensuring accountability by thoroughly investigating allegations of violations against children and by bringing perpetrators to justice;

(s) Commending the Government of the Philippines for integrating gender-sensitive provisions into the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act, which include guarantees for access to education for girls in situations of armed conflict, as well as access to comprehensive health services;

(t) Expressing serious concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed groups, including those who may have committed crimes, urging the Government to align its practice with the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act, including its provision that children associated with armed groups be treated primarily as victims of recruitment and use, and to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular the obligation that the arrest, detention and imprisonment of children should be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and that, in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration, also urging the Government to prioritize their reintegration, through family- and community-based programmes, including access to health care, psychosocial support and education programmes, as well as by raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of such children and facilitate their return, and further urging the Government to ensure that the prosecution of children is carried out with respect for the rights of the child;

(u) Urging the Government to reinforce the protection of children, including by taking all necessary measures to prevent and end the six grave violations against children in the context of armed conflict;

(v) Encouraging the Government of the Philippines to take measures to put an end to violations committed against children, including by members of its security forces and in particular those involving a high number of instances of killing and maiming of children and attacks against schools and hospitals attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines during the reporting period;

(w) Urging the Government to expedite the revision of its protocol on handling children in armed conflict, to align it with the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act and to ensure that victims of violations receive timely, effective, appropriate services and can access family- and community-based reintegration programmes;

(x) Expressing grave concern at the increased attacks on schools and their personnel, in particular in indigenous communities, urging the Government to take measures to protect schools, teachers and children, including in indigenous communities, and calling upon the Government to fully implement its National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace;

(y) Welcoming the lifting of martial law in Mindanao in December 2019 and calling upon the Government to facilitate humanitarian access to affected areas to assess the impact of the siege on the civilian population, in particular on children, and to provide humanitarian assistance, as necessary;

(z) Calling upon the Government to implement the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and to consider ratifying the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects in order to prevent the killing and maiming of children by improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war;

(aa) Urging the Government to pursue its efforts towards accountability, including through comprehensive, independent, timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, the prosecution, conviction and punishment of anyone found to be responsible for violations and abuses against children, and to ensure that all victims have access to justice as well as to the medical, psychosocial and support services that they need;

(bb) Calling upon the Government to address all ongoing violations against children, to support the implementation of its national child protection procedures and guidelines and to facilitate access to conflict-affected areas for child protection actors;

(cc) Further calling upon the Government to continue its constructive collaboration with the country task force on monitoring and reporting and the United Nations, and encouraging the Government to continue its cooperation with the task force to strengthen the capacity of its armed and security forces, as well as its auxiliary forces, with regard to child protection;

(dd) Calling upon the Government to ensure that the rights and needs of conflict-affected children are taken into account during the talks and in the implementation of any future peace agreements, including provisions on the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups, as well as provisions on the rights and well-being of children, and that they are integrated into peace negotiations, ceasefire and peace agreements and provisions for ceasefire

monitoring, where appropriate, and taking into account children's views, where possible, in those processes while recalling the existence of the *Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict* to integrate child protection issues into the processes;

To all armed groups operating in the Philippines, in particular the leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, the New People's Army, the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Moro National Liberation Front and the Maute Group

(ee) Urging the New People's Army, the Maute Group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and other armed groups to immediately end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, to issue military orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of anyone under 18 years of age and to immediately release all children from their ranks to civilian child protection actors and support their reintegration into society;

(ff) Calling upon all listed armed groups to enter into dialogue with the United Nations for the purpose of preparing action plans to end and prevent child recruitment and use;

(gg) Expressing deep concern about reports of the use of children by the Maute Group and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, including as human shields;

(hh) Expressing grave concern about the killing and maiming of children, as well as at other grave violations against children, committed by armed groups;

(ii) Urging the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the New People's Army to cease using children in any activity that may put the children at risk.

6. The Working Group agreed to address a message, through a public statement by the Chair of the Working Group, to community and religious leaders:

(a) Emphasizing the important role of community leaders in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict and in fostering reconciliation efforts;

(b) Urging them to publicly condemn and continue to advocate ending and preventing violations and abuses against children, in particular those involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abductions and attacks and threats of attacks against schools and hospitals, and to support the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict into their communities, including by raising awareness to avoid stigmatization of such children.

Recommendations to the Security Council

7. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter addressed to the Government of the Philippines:

(a) Stressing the primary role of the Government in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict in the Philippines and recalling that the Philippines is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

(b) Welcoming the promulgation of the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act in January 2019 and the signing of the implementing rules and regulations in June 2019, and urging the Government to swiftly implement those domestic legal obligations and to reinforce the protection of children, including

by taking preventive measures and ensuring accountability by thoroughly investigating allegations of violations against children and by bringing perpetrators to justice;

(c) Commending the Government of the Philippines for integrating gender-sensitive provisions into the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act, which include guarantees for access to education for girls in situations of armed conflict, as well as access to comprehensive health services, and encouraging the Government of the Philippines to ensure the provision of education, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict;

(d) Expressing serious concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed groups, and urging the Government to comply with the provisions of the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act, including that children be treated primarily as victims, in line with the best interests of the child as a primary consideration, and that detention be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in line with international law, and further urging the Government to ensure that, where children face prosecution for allegedly committing crimes, those prosecutions are carried out with respect for the rights of the child;

(e) Urging the Government to reinforce the protection of children, including by taking all necessary measures to prevent and end the six grave violations against children in the context of armed conflict;

(f) Encouraging the Government of the Philippines to take measures to put an end to violations committed against children, including by its security forces and in particular the high number of instances involving the killing and maiming of children and attacks against schools and hospitals attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines during the reporting period;

(g) Urging the Government to expedite the revision of its protocol on handling children in armed conflict, to align it with the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act and to ensure that victims of violations receive timely, effective and appropriate services and comprehensive reintegration programmes, including access to health care, psychosocial support and education programmes;

(h) Expressing grave concern at the increased attacks on schools and their personnel, in particular in indigenous communities, urging the Government to take measures to protect schools, teachers and children, including in indigenous communities, and calling upon the Government to fully implement its National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace;

(i) Welcoming the lifting of martial law in Mindanao in December 2019 and calling upon the Government to facilitate humanitarian access to affected areas to assess the impact of the siege on the civilian population, in particular children, and to provide humanitarian assistance, as necessary;

(j) Calling upon the Government to implement the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and to consider ratifying the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects in order to prevent the killing and maiming of children by improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war;

(k) Urging the Government to pursue its efforts towards accountability, including through comprehensive, independent, timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, the prosecution, conviction and punishment of anyone found to be responsible for violations and abuses against children, and to ensure that all victims have access to justice as well as to the medical, psychosocial and support services that they need;

(l) Calling upon the Government to address all ongoing violations against children, to support the implementation of its national child protection procedures and guidelines and to facilitate access to conflict-affected areas for child protection actors;

(m) Further calling upon the Government to continue its constructive collaboration with the country task force on monitoring and reporting and the United Nations, and encouraging the Government to continue its cooperation with the task force to strengthen the capacity of its armed and security forces, as well as its auxiliary forces, with regard to child protection;

(n) Calling upon the Government to ensure that the rights and needs of conflict-affected children are taken into account during the talks and in the implementation of any future peace agreements, including provisions on the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups, as well as provisions on the rights and well-being of children, and that they are integrated into peace negotiations, ceasefire and peace agreements and provisions for ceasefire monitoring, where appropriate, and taking into account children's views, where possible, in those processes while recalling the existence of the *Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict* to integrate child protection issues into the processes.

8. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter addressed to the Secretary-General:

(a) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure the continued effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict in the Philippines;

(b) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that the country task force on monitoring and reporting continues its ongoing work and advocacy for the release and reintegration of children associated with armed groups and armed forces and of children detained for their alleged association with armed groups;

(c) Requesting the Secretary-General to encourage the country task force on monitoring and reporting and other relevant United Nations entities to continue their engagement and efforts towards supporting the Government in preventing and ending violations and abuses committed against children, including through their protection and reintegration, the monitoring and reporting of the situation of children affected by armed conflict, the monitoring and implementation of action plans with armed groups and the conclusion of new action plans with armed groups;

(d) Encouraging the Secretary-General, including through the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, to broadly disseminate the *Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict* to relevant actors in the peace and mediation processes in the Philippines, to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated into and prioritized in all post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies, as well as in efforts towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and to encourage and facilitate consideration of the views of children in those processes in the Philippines.

Direct action by the Working Group

9. The Working Group agreed to transmit letters from the Chair of the Working Group addressed to the World Bank and other donors:

(a) Encouraging the international donor community to provide financial resources to assist the country task force and the United Nations in strengthening capacities for the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and to respond to and prevent further violations against children;

(b) Inviting international partners, including donors, to keep the Working Group informed of their funding and assistance efforts, as appropriate.

Annex

Statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations to the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict*

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and a good afternoon to SRS Gamba and good afternoon also to the members of the Working Group.

First, I wish to thank His Excellency Amb. Kridelka for convening this important meeting. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for her comprehensive report and presentation this afternoon.

Mr. Chair, distinguished members of the Working Group, it is my pleasure to make the following statement. Before doing so, I want to mention that a number of points that I will be making in my statement will be directly or indirectly addressing some of the points in the SRS G's report as well as some other issues which I will also like to flag to the Working Group.

Mr. Chair,

The Philippines is deeply committed to protecting our children, promoting their welfare and fulfilling their human rights. The Philippines shares the international community's desire to keep children away from armed conflict. The depth of our disdain for armed groups recruiting children and using them as human shields can be measured by our grim determination to defeat them. Children are never intended to be involved in combat. It is the Government's profound objective to keep children in schools and away from the battlefield.

The Philippines has established comprehensive legal and operational frameworks to protect children in armed conflict. I would just like to highlight some of the most significant ones:

First, In January 2019, President Duterte signed into law the Special Protection for Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act (RA 11188), or the CSAC Law), which legislates that children be protected in armed conflict situations from all forms of abuse, violence, neglect, cruelty, and discrimination. As far as I know, the Philippines is the only country in the world with such a law. The law also requires the Government to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and the commission of grave child rights violations against children involved in armed conflict. The law was mentioned by the SRS G in her report. The UN lent technical support for the crafting of its Implementing Rules and Regulations, which were signed in June last year. The IRR provides for a monitoring, reporting and response system that is similar to the monitoring and reporting mechanism under relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Secondly, in 2016, even prior to the CSAC Law, the Department of National Defense–Armed Forces of the Philippines issued a circular on Child Protection During Armed Conflict Situations that guides all armed forces units in their operations. It mandates that children who are rescued or recovered, including those apprehended for alleged association with rebel armed groups, are to be placed in the care of the local social welfare officer where they will receive psycho-social interventions, among others.

* The present annex is being issued without formal editing.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the SRSG's report, the Department of Education put in place in November 2017 the Policy on the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict. The policy identified grave child rights violations, and charged the Department with the duty to gather, report and monitor incidences of these violations and to ensure that children in armed conflict situations receive education intervention and services. This policy was reinforced by the National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace, which was issued in 2019.

Fourthly, our Department of Social Welfare and Development implements various regulations¹ generally aimed at facilitating the re-integration of former rebels and their families and children involved in armed conflict. The Department of Social Welfare and Development provides cash assistance as part of the Transitory Family Support Package for displaced persons in Marawi. It also implements a sustained delivery of essential needs and services for assistance, food, shelter and specialized interventions for children in armed conflict.

Fifth, the Philippine National Police, through its Women and Child Protection Center, initiated the development of a Child Protection Policy for the Police in October 2019 to ensure against violations and abuses of child rights.

Mr. Chair,

The Philippine Government unceasingly seeks ways to address the decades-long insurgency situation and to establish lasting peace. The Government jump-started the third round of peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) in 2017. These negotiations, however, had to be terminated because the rebels rejected the Government's proposals and, when negotiations were going on, violated the ceasefire.

In July 2018, after more than a decade of negotiations, the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front successfully concluded the peace process with the promulgation of the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Republic, which created the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, and this too was referred by the SRSG in her presentation this afternoon. Nevertheless, while peace with one group has been achieved, those with several other groups, including secessionist movements and terrorist groups, which are very active in certain parts specially in southern Philippines, remain to be aspirations for now. One such terrorist group is the ISIS-affiliated Maute Group that initiated the Marawi siege in May 2017. In only 5 months, the government forces were able to take back Marawi, but unfortunately with huge costs to the city and to the people, including, regrettably, the children. Rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Marawi are being undertaken by the Task Force Marawi. These efforts include clearing the city of explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, which, as reported, have injured several children.

In response to some of the grave violations contained in the report, I wish to state the following:

1. On the issue of detention of children, the Armed Forces of the Philippines underscored that it acts on all reports of detention of children. There is an existing mechanism for coordination and referral of incidents concerning children between the

¹ These DSWD regulations include (i) Administrative Order No. 14 s. 2019 on Guidelines in the Implementation of Executive Order No. 70 s.2018, (ii) Administrative Order No. 84 s.2002 on Procedures in the Handling and Treatment of Children Involved in Armed Conflict, (iii) Memorandum Circular No. 5 s.2019 or Guidelines in the Implementation of the Transitory Family Support Package for the Internally-Displaced Persons from the Most Affected Areas/Barangays of Marawi City, and (iv) Memorandum Circular No. 7 s.2019 or Guidelines in the Implementation of the Livelihood Settlement Grants for the Internally Displaced Persons of Marawi City.

government inter-agency committee on children led by the Council for the Welfare of Children and the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting led by UNICEF-Philippines. Violations on the handling of children are not condoned. They are dealt with according to the country's criminal justice system.

I would also like to point out that there have been several situations where the families opted for the children to stay in the military camp for security and protection. Such was the case of the 2 minors who stayed with the Maringal Battalion in Bukidnon in 2019. The minors who stay in the military camp are enrolled in Alternative Learning Systems and can go home to their families. Their families are also given a livelihood grant and financial assistance.

I wish to refer specifically to the item in the SRSG's report on the case supposedly verified by the UN of the detention of 35 children. The Armed Forces of the Philippines Human Rights Office did not receive any report of this, and thus was not dealt with by the CWC-CTFMR coordination and referral mechanism. I would therefore appreciate further information on this from the SRSG so that I can advise my authorities accordingly.

2. On the reported killing or maiming of children, please be assured that the government investigates all reported cases. For example, in the two cases reported in the town of Bulan, Sorsogon where 2 children were caught in the crossfire and suffered edge wounds and abrasions, cases were filed against the armed groups who instigated the incident. Furthermore, government officials who failed to report the presence of armed groups and prevent the firefight were also accordingly investigated and charged.

3. On the allegations of attack on schools, the AFP does not engage in hostilities in urban areas unless it is undertaken to immediately repel actual attacks or atrocities perpetrated by non-state actors against the citizenry. Reports of schools and health centers being used during military operations may be inaccurate as it is illegal to do so under existing law, unless such use is for military necessity and is merely temporary, or is made to protect the infrastructure, including its inhabitants.

4. With regard to concerns on closure of indigenous learning centers, the Department of Education, after exhaustive investigations prompted by numerous complaints, terminated specific schools that failed to comply with curriculum standards. Such schools took students out of their homes and made them raise funds, which is in violation of the Department of Education's Child Protection Policy. In other cases, such schools were operating in the ancestral domain of indigenous peoples' communities without securing the prior informed consent of these communities. Government authorities have also received complaints and testimonies of indigenous peoples leaders that elements of the CPP-NPA-NDF use "alternative education" to promote their revolutionary ends. Indigenous peoples leaders who resisted these communist rebels have been murdered.

5. On the Safe Schools Declaration, while there is no Philippine government inter-agency consensus to sign the political declaration as of this time, the Government is committed to the full implementation of existing laws and directives and effective state mechanisms in place to protect the civilian population, especially children. The Government has vowed to protect children through sustained efforts to eradicate corruption, criminality, illegal drugs, and terrorism. Given that the Safe Schools Declaration does not prevent non-State actors from attacking schools, the military is of the view that the front overseas organizations of the Communist Party of the Philippines will use the Declaration to boost their propaganda against the Philippine Government.

Mr. Chair,

The Philippines notes the observations and recommendations of the SRSG. The Government expresses its readiness to work with her and relevant UN agencies to promote the rights, safety, security and well-being of children involved in armed conflict. The Government, however, wishes to express concern that it has not been notified of some of the statistics and cases listed in the SRSG report, and in fact learned of them only when the report was sent to the Philippine Mission here in New York. I reiterate that the CWC-CTFMR coordination and referral mechanism was created precisely for sharing information, with the view to cooperating to achieve our shared goal of protecting the welfare of children caught in armed conflict. The mechanism is active and can be convened as necessary. I therefore urge the UN, through the UN Resident Coordinator in Manila and UNICEF-Philippines, to make full use of this mechanism.

Mr. Chair,

Looking forward, the Philippines is working towards fully implementing the CSAC Law and its IRR. A Nationwide Caravan to disseminate information on and awareness of this law and its Implementing Rules and Regulations will be done this year through virtual platforms given the continuing COVID-19 situation. A campaign dedicated for the children will likewise be conducted.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the Philippines' commitment to protect, promote and fulfill the rights and well-being of children in armed conflict situations. The Philippines also recognizes the importance of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, and again expresses its support to SRSG Virginia Gamba and our full readiness to continue to work with her in future endeavors to protect children in armed conflict.

Thank you.
