



# Security Council

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## Children and armed conflict in the Sudan

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the seventh report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Sudan and covers the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in the Sudan, highlighting trends in and patterns of the six grave violations against children, and contains, where available, information on perpetrators. In addition, it outlines information on the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through dialogue with parties.

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



## I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, covers the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021. It is the seventh report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Sudan to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report highlights trends in and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in the Sudan and contains details of the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2020/614](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in the Sudan ([S/AC.51/2020/7](#)). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the dialogue with parties to the conflict. Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations are identified. In the annexes to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/76/871-S/2022/493](#)), under List A of listed parties that had not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children, five armed groups are listed for the recruitment and use of children, namely, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction, the SPLM-N Malik Agar faction and the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW). Apart from the latter, all armed groups have in the past signed action plans with the United Nations.

2. The information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in the Sudan, co-chaired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Resident Coordinator, and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) until its withdrawal in December 2020. Since January 2021, the country task force has been chaired by the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) and UNICEF. Challenges relating to insecurity in and access to conflict-affected areas significantly hampered the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and related response measures in 2020, including restrictions on movement, further exacerbated those challenges. Therefore, the information contained in the report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the Sudan during the reporting period, and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher. Where incidents were committed earlier but verified only during the reporting period, that information is qualified as relating to an incident that was verified at a later date.

## II. Overview of political and security developments

3. The reporting period was marked by significant political, security and humanitarian developments in the Sudan.

4. In 2020 and the first half of 2021, the transitional Government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, undertook ambitious political, social and economic reforms to advance the political transition in the Sudan despite considerable challenges. Important progress was made on implementing key benchmarks of the Constitutional Document signed in 2019, including on peacemaking, democratic governance, the protection of fundamental rights and debt relief.

5. The signing of the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan between the Government of the Sudan, the Sudanese Revolutionary Front and the Sudan

Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi on 3 October 2020 was a political milestone and created an opening to address long-standing grievances and various conflict drivers in the country as part of the Sudanese transition process. The Juba Peace Agreement was a crucial step forward in the implementation of the political benchmarks of the transitional period. It entailed a permanent ceasefire, several region-specific protocols, a protocol on national issues, and measures such as the establishment of a special tribunal for crimes that took place in Darfur, together with other justice, accountability and reconciliation measures that address impunity for war crimes and serious violations of human rights, including those committed against children.

6. The SLA-AW faction remained outside the peace process and mobilized opposition to the Juba Peace Agreement within some camps for internally displaced persons in Darfur, which posed a challenge for the comprehensive resolution of the conflict as well as for the protection of civilians. The SPLM-N Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction and the transitional Government signed a declaration of principles on 28 March 2021, but talks held in Juba were adjourned on 15 June 2021 without an agreement. While negotiations for the peace agreement were being held, an uptick in local-level clashes involving rebel elements was observed, and areas under the influence of groups that did not join the peace process remained volatile.

7. Despite the efforts of the transitional Government, internal tensions delayed important elements of the Sudanese transition process, including the establishment of key transitional institutions. The economic situation also continued to deteriorate, leading to growing popular frustration over the country's political and economic challenges.

8. The transition process was significantly affected when, following months of rising tension between the civilian and military components of the Sudanese transitional authorities, on 25 October 2021, the Sudanese Armed Forces detained the Prime Minister and several civilian ministers, officials and political leaders and took control of the State media. In a televised address, the Chairperson of the Sovereign Council and Commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, announced a state of emergency, dismissed State governors and suspended several articles of the Constitutional Document, effectively dissolving the Sovereign Council, the Council of Ministers and the as yet unformed Transitional Legislative Council and restoring the Transitional Military Council, among other measures.

9. In response to the military's actions, large crowds gathered across the Sudan in protest at the military coup, and a campaign of civil disobedience was launched. The army and security forces used live ammunition and tear gas to first contain and then disperse the protests, resulting in significant civilian casualties in the days and weeks following the military coup.

10. In response, significant efforts, including by the United Nations, were made to facilitate dialogue and support a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis, allowing for a return to constitutional order. On 21 November, an agreement was signed between Lieutenant General Al-Burhan and Mr. Hamdok. However, the agreement was widely condemned by civilian political forces. In the context of increased violence against protesters and the absence of support for the agreement, Mr. Hamdok announced his resignation on 2 January 2022.

11. The military coup was widely condemned by Sudanese stakeholders and international actors and threatened years of progress towards peace and democracy in the Sudan. It also hampered United Nations activities in the country, including in relation to child protection.

12. Overall, since the coup, the security situation across the Sudan has worsened, with civil unrest in parts of the country, pockets of violence in Darfur, tribal tensions generating clashes in Eastern Sudan, and new outbreaks of intercommunal violence, especially in Darfur and Southern Kordofan, that affected the protection of children. Against that background, the human rights situation in the Sudan remained fragile, with continued reports of attacks against civilians, conflict-related sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detention. The economic situation has deteriorated, and Darfur, the most impoverished region in the country, was particularly affected by high inflation and a scarcity of fuel and other commodities during the reporting period.

13. Humanitarian needs continued to grow owing to the economic crisis, food insecurity, heavy rains, severe flooding, disease outbreaks, conflict and prolonged displacement. The political crisis following the military coup of 25 October 2021 and the socioeconomic deterioration further negatively affected the humanitarian situation. An increase in the involvement of security authorities in approving the movement of humanitarian personnel and a rise in bureaucratic interferences were noted, and timeframes for the approval of work and travel permits also increased. Prior to the military coup, humanitarian access had improved as the civilian transitional Government pursued its reform of and commitments under the humanitarian framework in the Sudan, and humanitarian workers were able to access previously inaccessible areas under the control of armed groups in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States. However, temporary access to conflict-affected populations in some areas remained a challenge owing to insecurity.

14. In addition, the reporting period saw the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country in March 2020, which exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation and placed additional strain on the fragile health-care system. Measures to curb the spread of the virus, such as movement restrictions, affected vulnerable populations and further complicated the delivery of assistance to populations in need as well as the implementation of child protection activities and the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children.

15. UNAMID withdrew during the reporting period. On 3 June 2020, the Security Council adopted resolution [2524 \(2020\)](#), by which it established UNITAMS, mandated, inter alia, to assist with the political transition, peace processes, peacebuilding, civilian protection and rule of law, and with the mobilization of economic and development assistance. UNAMID ceased its mandated activities on 31 December 2020, and UNITAMS reached its initial operational capacity on 1 January 2021. This development had a significant impact on the work of the country task force, as UNITAMS assumed child protection responsibilities from UNAMID, including the role of Co-Chair of the country task force on monitoring and reporting during a time of heightened tension in the Sudan, and had significantly reduced dedicated child protection capacities compared with UNAMID. In addition, in the light of the country-wide mandate of UNITAMS, monitoring and reporting arrangements evolved from separate monitoring and reporting activities on Darfur and Abyei (a contested region on the border of South Sudan and the Sudan), Blue Nile and South Kordofan to a whole-of-Sudan approach by the United Nations. In addition, for the purpose of monitoring and reporting in Abyei, the country task force in the Sudan also cooperates with the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei.

### III. Update on the main actors involved in the armed conflict in the Sudan

#### Government security forces

16. The Sudanese Armed Forces are the military forces of the Sudan, consisting of the Land Forces, the Sudanese Navy, the Sudanese Air Force, and the intelligence unit within the Sudanese Armed Forces, which is referred to as Sudan Military Intelligence. Following the implementation of the Government's 2016 action plan on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children, the Sudanese Armed Forces were delisted from the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict as of 2018 (S/2018/465).

17. The Rapid Support Forces gained recognition as an independent armed actor in the Constitutional Document of 2019 for the transitional period, following the Sudanese revolution that year. These Forces are composed of former bodyguards and Government-allied Arab militias from Darfur states and report to the Commander-in-Chief of the Sudanese Armed Forces, although in practice, the Forces are known to report directly to the Vice-Chair of the Sovereign Council and the Commander of the Forces, Lieutenant General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti.

18. The General Intelligence Service was created by the Transitional Military Council in 2019 to replace the National Intelligence and Security Service, in response to calls from protesters for the dissolution of the latter because of its involvement in the violent response to popular demonstrations in 2018 and 2019. Following the military coup of 25 October 2021, the General Intelligence Service was granted staff immunities and the authority to arrest and detain civilians, privileges its predecessor had lost following the political changes in 2019.

19. A further Government security force is the Sudanese Police Force.

#### Armed groups

20. JEM, SLA-MM and the SPLM-N Malik Agar faction signed the Juba Peace Agreement in 2020, with senior members of the groups being appointed to Government positions, including Minni Minawi, who was appointed as Governor of Darfur under the terms of the Juba Agreement, and JEM members who were appointed to cabinet positions, including to the Ministry of Social Development, which is responsible for child protection services in the Sudan.

21. The SPLM-N Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction continued to hold territories in Blue Nile and in the Nuba mountains in South Kordofan. The peace dialogue between the al-Hilu faction and the transitional Government stalled in 2021.

22. SLA-AW experienced internal divisions and leadership disagreements, resulting in infighting and further splintering, and in a group led by Ali Hamid "Shakush", with a presence in Central Darfur, defecting to join the Juba peace process. The territorial control and operational capabilities of SLA-AW decreased significantly during the reporting period. Meanwhile, the Sudan Liberation Movement-Transitional Council (SLM-TC), which defected from SLA-AW in 2014, played a leading role in the Juba peace process, with its head, Al-Hadi Idris, representing the Sudanese Revolutionary Front in the negotiations.

23. In addition, the Juba peace process resulted in the formation of the Sudanese Alliance (also referred to as Sudan Coalition), which consists of 15 armed groups under the command of Khamis Abdalla Abkar. Its members include the Sudan Liberation Army (Khamis Abdalla Abkar faction), the Sudan Liberation Movement/Reform (Hafgiz Allazem Siddig faction) and the Justice and Equality Movement/

Democratic (Idriss Ibrahim Azrag faction). Several members of the Sudanese Alliance have been historically connected to parties listed for grave violations against children, such as SLA-MM, SLA-AW or JEM. Since its formation, the Sudanese Alliance has recruited and trained its recruits as one group.

#### **IV. Grave violations against children**

24. The country task force verified 520 grave violations against 445 children (287 boys and 157 girls, 1 sex unknown). Of these, 317 violations occurred in 2020 and 203 in 2021. A total of 31 children (8 boys and 23 girls) were affected by multiple violations. Thirteen children (girls) were abducted and experienced sexual violence and maiming, seven children (girls) were abducted and experienced sexual violence, nine children (six boys and three girls) were abducted and maimed, and two children (boys) were abducted and then killed. In addition, the task force verified during the reporting period 32 grave violations affecting 23 children (17 boys and 6 girls) that had taken place prior to the reporting period, including the killing of 10 boys, the maiming of 7 boys and 2 girls, rape and other forms of sexual violence against 4 girls, and nine attacks on schools.

25. One hundred violations, almost one fifth of the total, were attributed to Government security forces, including the Sudanese Armed Forces (61), the Rapid Support Forces (32), the Sudanese Police Force (5), Sudan Military Intelligence (1) and the Central Reserve Police (1). Another 86 violations were attributed to armed groups, including SLA-AW (60), SLM-TC (20), the SLA-AW splinter group led by Ali Hamid “Shakush” (2), JEM (2), the Sudanese Alliance (1) and the SPLM-N Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction (1), while 332 violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (63.5 per cent) and 2 to the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces.

26. Violations were verified in West Darfur (150), Central Darfur (129), North Darfur (111), South Darfur (87), South Kordofan (14), Abyei (10), Blue Nile (9), East Darfur (8), Kassala (1) and Red Sea (1).

27. The killing and maiming of children (356) was the most verified grave violation, accounting for 68.5 per cent of the total, followed by rape and other forms of sexual violence (74) and abduction (34). The trends are consistent with the findings of the previous report ([S/2020/614](#)), even though the previous report covered a longer period. It is noteworthy that there was a significant increase in the verified recruitment and use of children from 4 in the previous report to 25 in this reporting period, including as a result of recruitment drives of armed groups following the signature of the Juba Peace Agreement.

28. Owing to significant constraints on access, in particular to conflict-affected areas in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the Sudan, with the actual number of violations likely to be higher. The lower number of violations in the second half of the reporting period does not indicate an improvement of the child protection situation but could be linked to decreased monitoring capacities following the withdrawal of UNAMID from Darfur.

##### **A. Recruitment and use**

29. The recruitment and use of 25 children (21 boys and 4 girls) were verified. Of these cases, 13 occurred in 2020 and 12 in 2021. Six of the children were under the age of 15, with the youngest 11 years of age.

30. The violations were attributed to SLM-TC (20), JEM (2), the SLA-AW splinter group led by Ali Hamid “Shakush” (2) and the Sudanese Alliance (1). All violations occurred in the Darfur states, with the majority verified in Central Darfur (16), followed by North Darfur (8) and West Darfur (1).

31. Children were used as combatants (3), in support roles (2) or for unknown purposes (20). Two boys recruited and used in Central Darfur were informed that they would be trained and deployed to Libya.

32. Push factors driving the recruitment of children included insecurity, displacement, family separation and poverty. Of the recruited children, seven (four boys and three girls) joined the armed groups in order to be able to cover their basic needs, while four (boys) joined seeking protection. For example, in January 2021, the country task force verified the recruitment and use of a 16-year-old boy, belonging to the Fur tribe, in Central Darfur, who had been separated from his family following an attack on his village in Jebel Marra by the Sudanese Armed Forces in 2016. Following the attack, the boy joined SLM-TC seeking to meet his basic needs and receive protection.

33. Of the recruited children, four had been released at the time of reporting. The whereabouts of the remaining 21 children remain unknown.

34. Most cases of recruitment and use (86 per cent) occurred over just four months, between October 2020 and January 2021. Almost one third of the children were recruited in the context of recruitment drives of armed groups, following the signature of the Juba Peace Agreement on 3 October 2020, in order for the groups to position themselves ahead of the implementation of the security arrangements under the peace agreement.

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

35. A total of seven children (six boys and one girl) were detained by the Sudanese Armed Forces for their alleged association with armed groups. All children were later released.

### **B. Killing and maiming**

36. The killing (120) and maiming (236) of 356 children (258 boys and 97 girls, 1 sex unknown) were verified. Of these, 190 child casualties were killed or maimed in 2020 and 166 in 2021. The ages of children killed or maimed ranged from 1 to 17 years of age, with most children above the age of 10. Teenage boys were most affected by killing and maiming, representing over one third of all child casualties and over 90 per cent of children killed or maimed by explosive remnants of war.

37. The violations were attributed to Government security forces (62) (Sudanese Armed Forces (39), Rapid Support Forces (21) and the Sudanese Police Force (2)), SLA-AW (33) and the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (2). However, most child casualties (259) were attributed to unidentified perpetrators. Violations occurred in West Darfur (136), North Darfur (72), Central Darfur (66), South Darfur (52), Abyei (8), Blue Nile (8), South Kordofan (7), East Darfur (5), Kassala (1) and Red Sea (1).

38. Causes of child casualties included the use of small arms and light weapons (173), explosive remnants of war (64), mortar and rocket attacks (6) and the use of improvised explosive devices (3), which together accounted for 69 per cent (246) of the total number of casualties.

39. The United Nations also verified the killing (10) and maiming (9) of 19 children (17 boys and 2 girls) that had taken place in West Darfur in 2019 and were attributed to the Rapid Support Forces (16) and unidentified perpetrators (3).

40. Intercommunal violence continued to significantly affect the lives of children, especially in the Darfur states, with West Darfur most affected. Almost half of the child casualties verified had been maimed or killed in the context of intercommunal violence, often owing to conflict between pastoralists and farmers. In many instances, the country task force was unable to identify the perpetrators or establish whether they belonged to a specific party to the conflict.

41. For example, in January 2020, intercommunal violence, allegedly between Misseriya and Dinka tribes, resulted in the killing of five boys and one girl in Abyei. In another incident, in January 2021, an attack on an internally displaced persons camp in El Geneina, West Darfur, resulted in the killing of 15 and maiming of 13 children. The unidentified perpetrators were described as belonging to Arab tribes, whereas most of the victims were from the Masalit community. The incident followed the killing of an Arab man by a member of the Masalit community the previous day.

42. Armed clashes between Government security forces and armed groups remained of concern, and more than half of the violations attributed to the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Police Force occurred during such clashes. For example, in July 2021, an attack on an internally displaced persons camp in North Darfur, carried out by the Sudanese Armed Forces on the basis of the suspicion that the camp was housing SLA-AW elements, resulted in the killing of nine children (six boys and three girls) and the maiming of 17 children (10 boys and 7 girls).

43. The presence of explosive remnants of war, especially in Darfur states, continued to gravely affect children in the Sudan, accounting for nearly one fifth of all child casualties (64). Children typically encountered explosive remnants of war while playing or carrying out domestic chores, such as fetching water, collecting firewood or herding livestock. Unable to identify explosive remnants of war as deadly hazards, children played with the objects or hit them with stones, triggering explosions that would result in the loss of life or limbs. For example, in February 2021, a 12-year-old boy in Blue Nile State found an explosive remnant of war while herding animals. Unable to identify the object, he began to play with it. The device exploded, injuring his hand and leg and killing four of his animals. The boy was transferred to a hospital for medical and psychosocial support.

44. Of further concern, children in the Sudan continued to be affected by the excessive use of force by Government security forces during public demonstrations, including in the course of the 25 October 2021 coup. The United Nations verified the killing of seven children (six boys and one girl) and the maiming of 13 children (11 boys and 2 girls) in this context between 25 October and 31 December 2021, which fall outside the scope of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. The children were killed or maimed as a result of the use of live ammunition (14) and tear gas (5) against protesters or through ill-treatment (1).

### **C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence**

45. The country task force verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against 74 children (1 boy and 73 girls), of which 57 occurred in 2020 and 17 in 2021. The children were aged between 6 and 17 years old, with girls representing 99 per cent of the survivors.



46. The violations were attributed to Government security forces (18) (the Sudanese Armed Forces (13), the Sudanese Police Force (3) and the Rapid Support Forces (2)), SLA-AW (15) and unidentified perpetrators (41). The violations were perpetrated in Central Darfur (29), North Darfur (24), South Darfur (17) and West Darfur (4).

47. The verified cases involved rape (50), gang rape (11), attempted rape (7) and sexual assault (6). A total of 34 survivors received medical and psychosocial support.

48. In addition, during the reporting period, the country task force verified incidents of rape against four girls in West Darfur (3) and Blue Nile (1), which had been perpetrated in 2019 and were attributed to the Sudanese Police Force (1) and unidentified perpetrators (3).

49. Children were often subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence while conducting farming activities (23), collecting firewood or fetching water (13) when in or close to their homes (12) or while moving between locations (3). For example, in June 2020, members of SLA-AW raped four girls in Jebel Marra, Central Darfur. The violations occurred in the context of internal fighting between SLA-AW factions. In another incident, in November 2021, several unidentified perpetrators raped a girl in North Darfur while she was engaging in farming activities.

50. The high prevalence of gender-based violence, rooted in gender inequality, power imbalances and the marginalization of women and girls and compounded by the dire humanitarian, security and economic situation, continued to affect children in the Sudan.

51. Accountability for sexual violence in the Sudan remains very low. Of the verified cases, 28 were reported to the police, 1 resulted in the sentencing of the perpetrator in a court, and 1 was diverted from official judicial procedures. In four incidents, the legal procedure had not been finalized at the time of reporting. Overall, the situation in the Sudan remained characterized by a lack of rule of law and a culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence.

52. Sexual violence is a violation that often remains underreported owing to stigmatization, risks of reprisals, the lack of accountability and the absence of adequate support services for survivors. Survivors often experience blame and alienation from their community after enduring sexual violence, especially if they become pregnant as a result.

## **D. Attacks on schools and hospitals**

53. The country task force verified 21 attacks on schools (11) and hospitals (10), including 4 attacks on protected persons in relation to hospitals. Of these, 19 incidents occurred in 2020 and 2 in 2021.

54. The violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (19), including all attacks on schools, and to the Central Reserve Police (1) and SLA-AW (1). The attacks occurred in South Kordofan (7), West Darfur (7), Central Darfur (4), East Darfur (1), North Darfur (1) and South Darfur (1).

55. Attacks on schools occurred predominantly during intercommunal violence, and six of the incidents involved looting. Nine of the affected schools were primary schools, including one for girls and three for boys. For example, in May 2020, in South Kordofan, four primary schools were looted following intercommunal violence between Arab and Nuba tribes that forced the local inhabitants to flee their homes and seek refuge in the schools. After the displaced persons returned to their homes, unidentified armed perpetrators entered the schools and looted educational materials,

school supplies and furniture. The access to education of approximately 1,740 children was affected by the incidents.

56. Attacks on hospitals included the looting and burning of health centres (3); attacks on medical personnel (4), including the killing of a health worker; carjacking (1); and incidents of break-in and theft (2). All but one of the attacks occurred in the context of intercommunal violence.

57. Attacks on nine additional schools by the Rapid Support Forces (5) in West Darfur and the Sudanese Armed Forces (4) in South Darfur that occurred between 2016 and 2019 were verified at a later date.

#### **Military use of schools and hospitals**

58. The country task force also verified the military use of eight schools by the Sudanese Armed Forces (5), the Rapid Support Forces (1), the Central Reserve Police (1) and unidentified perpetrators (1) in West Darfur (3), Central Darfur (2), South Darfur (2) and South Kordofan (1), three instances of which occurred in the context of intercommunal violence. For example, the Sudanese Armed Forces used a primary school and a secondary school in West Darfur as barracks and dormitories for their forces between April 2021 and July 2021. All of the school facilities were used, including classrooms and latrines, rendering the school unusable for educational purposes. The cases also included the ongoing use of two primary schools since 2016. The military use of two hospitals in South Darfur (1) and West Darfur (1) in 2020 by the Sudanese Armed Forces was also verified.

### **E. Abduction**

59. The abduction of 34 children (15 boys and 19 girls) between 8 and 17 years of age was verified, of which 33 violations occurred in 2020 and 1 in 2021.

60. The violations were attributed to Government security forces (13) (Sudanese Armed Forces (4) and Rapid Support Forces (9)), SLA-AW (11) and unidentified perpetrators (10). Violations occurred in South Darfur (16), Central Darfur (9), North Darfur (5), Abyei (2) and West Darfur (2).

61. Children were abducted for ransom (9), for the purpose of sexual violence (4), to be trafficked (2) or to be forced into labour (1). The purpose of the abduction of 18 children was unknown. The length of abduction periods varied, with some children held for 2 days and others for 28 days before being released. The status and whereabouts of four of the abducted children remained unknown at the time of reporting, and two children were killed while being held, while the remaining 28 children were released. In most cases, children were abducted in proximity to their homes (8), during attacks on their villages (4) or while herding animals (4), collecting firewood or water (3) or visiting public spaces such as markets (3).

62. Government security forces were responsible for over one third of the abductions. For example, in August 2020, the Rapid Support Forces in South Darfur abducted a boy while he was herding animals and held him for ransom for three days.

63. In another incident, SLA-AW, also responsible for one third of violations, abducted five girls from their homes in Central Darfur and held them for two days until their families paid ransoms. While abducted, the girls were ill-treated and sexually assaulted.

## **F. Denial of humanitarian access**

64. The country task force verified 10 incidents of denial of humanitarian access affecting the delivery of aid to children. Of these, five incidents were verified in 2020 and five in 2021. The incidents were attributed to Government security forces (6) (the Sudanese Armed Forces (5) and Sudan Military Intelligence (1)), the SPLM-N Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction (1) and unidentified perpetrators (3). Denials of humanitarian access were verified in Central Darfur (5), East Darfur (2), South Darfur (1), Blue Nile (1) and North Darfur (1).

65. The verified incidents involved multiple types of denial of humanitarian access, including entry restrictions for humanitarian personnel (6), threats and violence against humanitarian personnel (2), theft (3) and vehicle hijacking (2), with some incidents involving multiple types of violations. Multilateral and international non-governmental organizations were most affected.

66. For example, in December 2021, unidentified perpetrators attacked three warehouses of a United Nations agency in El Fasher, North Darfur. More than 5,000 metric tons of food were seized by hundreds of looters, who also dismantled part of the warehouses. As a result of the incident, the agency had to suspend operations in the area until the following month. In another incident, in East Darfur, repeated attacks against the medical agency of an international non-governmental organization forced the reduction of medical services provided by the agency to a refugee camp hosting more than 19,000 South Sudanese refugees. Overall, the United Nations estimates that more than 75,000 children were negatively affected by these verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access.

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

### **A. Progress in the legislative and policy frameworks**

67. In May 2020, the transitional Government adopted the National Plan for the Protection of Civilians. The plan was developed with the aim of ensuring the protection of civilians after the exit of UNAMID, in line with international protection standards. It provides for access to justice for children and prohibits the recruitment and use of and violence against children, among other objectives. The United Nations has been engaging with the transitional Government to support the full implementation of the plan.

68. In 2021, supported by the United Nations, the transitional Government made notable efforts to revise the Child Act of 2010, resulting in the drafting of an updated Child Act in 2021. The revision included the strengthening of birth registration articles. In that regard, civil registration regulations were amended to be more nuanced and inclusive, and a new standard operating procedure for the birth registration of vulnerable children was developed. Following the military coup of October 2021, progress on this initiative stalled.

69. A national law on the protection of, and criminalization of attacks on, health practitioners and health facilities was passed on 29 May 2020. To improve the detection of and reporting on attacks on health-care facilities and protected personnel, staff of the Ministry of Health at the national level and health cluster members received training on the Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care of the World Health Organization, which the Sudan had joined in 2019. The same year also saw the transitional Government criminalize female genital mutilation, with the first case

brought to court in 2021 against the parents and grandparents of an 8-year-old girl who was subjected to that form of mutilation in Khartoum State.

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

70. Supported by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the country task force engaged with the transitional Government to sustain the gains of its 2016 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and pave the way towards the development of a national plan for the prevention of grave violations against children. The task force also advocated the implementation by armed groups in the Sudan of existing action plans and road maps for ending and preventing grave violations.

71. In 2021, the country task force engaged with the signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement to strengthen commitments on the protection of conflict-affected children in a comprehensive and collective manner. Within the framework of the Government's 2016 action plan, signatories agreed to reactivate the high-level and technical committees – two structures that had been instrumental in implementing the action plan. The process included the participation of the Justice and Equality Movement, SLA-MM and the SPLM-N Malik Agar faction – all listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict for the recruitment and use of children ([A/76/871-S/2022/493](#)). On the basis of the Government's existing child protection commitments, a road map was developed that encompassed both responsive and preventative elements to enhance the protection of conflict-affected children. The road map was endorsed by the technical committee in December 2021. First implementation steps, planned for 2022, include verification missions to conflict-affected states across the Sudan, the screening of troops of Juba Peace Agreement signatories for the identification, release and reintegration of children among their ranks, and the development of a communication campaign on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children.

72. In March 2020, the country task force held a workshop with the SPLM-N Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction in South Sudan to review the status of the group's 2016 action plan and develop a road map to expedite its implementation on the basis of 10 benchmarks. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and owing to a lack of access to areas under the faction's control, engagement on the implementation of the road map stalled. In 2021, the United Nations engaged with the faction to support the development of a humanitarian operational plan for areas controlled by the faction, which includes components for ending and preventing grave violations against children.

73. There was no significant engagement with SLA-AW on ending and preventing grave violations against children during the reporting period. An important development was the granting of access, by the transitional Government and SLA-AW, to conflict-affected areas in South and East Jebel Marra, Kass localities and Central Darfur, some of which had been inaccessible to the United Nations for 10 years.

## **C. Programmatic responses, advocacy, and outreach on child protection**

74. Numerous challenges, including political instability, insecurity, the absence of a national framework for the release and reintegration of children, reduced child protection capacities, and restrictions imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19, affected the ability of the United Nations to engage with parties to the conflict on the release and reintegration of children. Consequently, no formal releases of children

associated with armed groups and forces were conducted. To address the issue going forward, the technical committee, supported by the country task force, developed a national framework for children associated with armed forces and armed groups, which serves as a strategy and guide for the release and reintegration of children. The framework was adopted at the technical level on 27 December 2021 and endorsed on 13 June 2022 by the National High-level Committee on the Action Plan to provide technical support to the committee in developing a national strategy on the protection of children in conflict.

75. Considering the significant impact of explosive remnants of war on children, as one of the leading causes of the killing and maiming of children, mine action activities remained of high relevance in the Sudan. During the reporting period, the United Nations supported the clearing of over 3.2 million square metres of land, benefitting nearly 290,000 children. In addition, almost 320,00 children benefitted from explosive ordnance risk education, especially in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, which are the most contaminated States.

76. During the reporting period, the Sudanese Armed Forces, with the support of the country task force, developed a child protection training module for internal capacity-building purposes. The module is pending the official endorsement of the technical committee. In 2021, it was piloted during training in Khartoum and South Kordofan to the benefit of 285 Sudanese Armed Forces officers and 12 civilian staff from the Ministry of Social Development. Both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Justice and Equality Movement renewed and disseminated command orders to prevent the recruitment and use of children. The country task forces also shared samples of such command orders with other signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement, encouraging their adoption and dissemination.

## **VI. Observations and recommendations**

77. I am concerned about the ongoing grave violations committed against children by all parties to the conflict in the Sudan, in particular killing and maiming, sexual violence and abductions. I call upon all parties to cease and prevent all grave violations against children and abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

78. I am troubled by the high number of children killed and maimed and by the fact that the majority of these child casualties were caused by the use of small arms and explosive remnants of war. I urge all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and better protect children, including in the conduct of military operations and from the risks and effects of explosive remnants of war. I urge parties to refrain from the use of explosive devices that cause death or injury to children. I call upon the Sudanese authorities to ensure the safety of and access for mine action operations and upon the international community to step up support to such operations.

79. I am concerned by the increase in cases of the recruitment and use of children, all by armed groups. I urge all parties to immediately release, without preconditions, all children from their ranks and hand them over to civilian child protection actors in line with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

80. I highlight the importance of sustainable and timely gender-, age- and disability-sensitive assistance programmes, including access to health care, psychosocial support and educational opportunities and to reintegration support guided by the

Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles) endorsed by the Sudan.

81. I welcome the cooperation of the national authority and armed group signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement with the United Nations on the screening of forces with the purpose of identifying children among their ranks and facilitating their release, and I encourage the continuation of such efforts.

82. I note that children were detained for their alleged association with armed groups and later released. I encourage the Sudanese authorities to continue to implement their standard operating procedures for the release and handover of children associated with armed groups and captured during operations, signed in April 2018.

83. The escalating intercommunal violence in the Sudan, in particular in Darfur, and its devastating impact on children are worrisome. I reiterate the relevance of the National Plan for the Protection of Civilians and urge the Government to reactivate the National Mechanism for the Protection of Civilians. I call upon the Sudanese authorities and signatory armed movements to fulfil their commitments under the Juba Peace Agreement and expedite the implementation of the transitional security arrangements.

84. I reiterate my concern over ongoing access restrictions to conflict-affected areas, especially as this hinders the delivery of life-saving services to children. I urge all parties to the conflict to enable the unhindered and safe access of the United Nations and humanitarian partners to conflict-affected populations. I underline that schools and hospitals must remain safe spaces for children and thus must be protected from attack at all times. I further call upon all parties to immediately vacate all schools and hospitals used for military purposes.

85. I urge the Government to ensure accountability for grave violations by bringing perpetrators to justice and providing remedies to victims of grave violations. I highlight the importance of investigating all allegations of violations and abuses against children, including in the context of civil unrest, and of strengthening judicial and law enforcement capacities. I further call upon the Government to continue to strengthen the legal framework of the Sudan for the protection of children, including by continuing national efforts to apply and strengthen the existing Child Act and by ratifying the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

86. I welcome the steps taken by the Sudanese authorities to consolidate the gains of its now completed action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, signed in 2016. However, I remain concerned about continuing grave violations attributed to their security forces. In this regard, I urge the national authorities to strengthen measures to prevent the killing and maiming of children and other grave violations by Government security forces in the context of military operations or when responding to public demonstrations.

87. I welcome the collaboration between the Sudanese authorities and the United Nations to strengthen the protection of children that, in 2021, resulted in the adoption by the national authorities and armed group signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement of a road map based on the 2016 action plan on ending and preventing child recruitment and use. I call for the timely implementation of the road map and urge the full operationalization and use of high-level and technical committees to ensure the coordination and implementation of all its provisions.

88. I call upon the Sudanese authorities to strengthen systems for the protection of children across the Sudan and reiterate the importance of long-term protection measures, including the strengthening of social services and the building of strong institutions with the capacity to ensure the rights and respond to the needs of children.

I reiterate my call upon them to engage with the United Nations on a longer-term national plan to prevent all grave violations and sustain the gains of the 2016 action plan. I encourage the Sudanese authorities to continue to engage with the United Nations on ending and preventing grave violations within the framework of the Darfur Permanent Ceasefire Committee.

89. I call upon the armed groups listed in the annexes to my most recent annual report on children and armed conflict ([A/76/871-S/2022/493](#)) to cooperate with the country task force on the protection of children. In this regard, I urge the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid, including all its factions, to engage with the United Nations on the development and signature of an action plan. I call upon the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction to swiftly implement the road map developed with the United Nations on the implementation of its 2016 action plan. I call upon the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu and Malik Agar factions to fully implement their respective action plans and other child protection commitments, including under the 2021 road map.

90. I appeal to the international community to ensure that sufficient resources are available, in particular for UNITAMS and UNICEF, to continue to support the national authorities in the protection of children, the reintegration and rehabilitation of children affected by conflict, the monitoring and reporting on the situation of children affected by conflict, and the monitoring and implementation of existing and future child protection commitments.

91. The conflicts in the Sudan have had long-lasting and devastating impacts for children. At this time of political uncertainty, I call upon all parties to work towards the restoration of a civilian-led transition through inclusive, Sudanese-owned and -led political dialogue. I underline that achieving durable peace, democracy and economic recovery in the Sudan is the only sustainable way to protect children affected by years of armed conflict. I call upon all parties in the Sudan to place the rights and needs of Sudanese children at the centre of all current and future efforts towards peace and democracy.

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