



Security Council

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Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Nigeria

1. During a closed videoconference held on 27 July 2020, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict examined the second report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria ([S/2020/652](#)), covering the period from January 2017 to December 2019, which was introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Nigeria 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 expressed deep concern at the six grave violations that continued to be committed against children affected by the armed conflict in Nigeria. They condemned the continued instances of the six grave violations committed by Boko Haram, in particular, the abduction, recruitment, use, killing and maiming of children, as well as the commission of sexual violence against them. They expressed grave concern at the increased number of children, particularly girls, abducted by Boko Haram, notably for the purpose of sexual violence and as carriers of improvised explosives devices, as well as at attacks and threats of attacks on schools and hospitals and at the denial of humanitarian access. The members of the Working Group commended both the Government of Nigeria and the Civilian Joint Task Force for the constructive role that they had played in the adoption and implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Task Force and encouraged the Task Force to fully complete the implementation of the action plan. They urged the Government of Nigeria to pursue its efforts to promote accountability by investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for the six grave violations against children and to ensure that all victims had access to justice, with the best interests of children as a primary consideration. They acknowledged the efforts of the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Nigeria, as well as the challenges that it faced in verifying the six grave violations, and they expressed their concern about the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on Nigeria, which negatively affected children in armed conflict.
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 as set out below.

Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group

5. The Working Group agreed to address the following message, through a public statement by the Chair of the Working Group, to all the parties to the armed conflict, including Boko Haram factions, the Nigerian security forces and the Civilian Joint Task Force:

To all the parties to the armed conflict

(a) Strongly condemning all violations and abuses committed against children by all parties to the conflict in Nigeria and neighbouring countries affected by the actions of Boko Haram, expressing grave concern at the disproportionate negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and urging all parties to the conflict to immediately end and prevent all violations of applicable international law 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) Noting with concern that access restrictions to conflict-affected areas during the reporting period presented challenges to the verification of the six grave violations against children and that the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria (S/2020/652) therefore does not reflect the full impact of armed conflict on children in Nigeria;

(c) Calling upon the parties to further implement the previous conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Nigeria (S/AC.51/2017/5);

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

(e) Expressing deep concern at and condemnation of the continued recruitment and use of children, commending both the Government of Nigeria and the Civilian Joint Task Force for the constructive role that they have played in the adoption and implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Task Force, including by facilitating the disengagement of 2,203 boys and girls, strongly urging all parties to the armed conflict, including Boko Haram, to immediately and without preconditions release all children associated with them and end and prevent the further recruitment and use of children and further calling upon the Government of Nigeria to end and prevent the use of children to carry out menial jobs at some of its armed forces bases;

(f) Expressing grave concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their or their parents' association or alleged association with Boko Haram, while noting the release by the Nigerian authorities of 1,591 children from detention (S/2020/652, para. 71), emphasizing that children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts should be treated primarily as victims and urging the Government of Nigeria to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

(g) Expressing deep concern at the high number of children killed or maimed as a result of suicide attacks by Boko Haram, many of which were conducted by

children, the majority of whom were girls used as carriers of improvised explosive devices, as a direct or indirect result of hostilities between parties to the armed conflict and of incidents of indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including those involving aerial bombardment, crossfire, gunshots and unexploded ordnance, and calling upon all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined therein;

(h) Expressing grave concern about the high number of incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children, including displaced children, urging all parties to the armed conflict 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 by members of their respective groups or forces and stressing the importance of accountability for those who commit sexual violence against children, underscoring that girls continued to be deliberately targeted through rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and forced marriage, noting with concern the difficulty of tracking, documenting and verifying such violations and abuses owing to a lack of safe reporting mechanisms, survivors' fear of stigma and retaliatory attacks and a lack of access to some conflict-affected areas by the country task force, resulting in underreporting of the prevalence of cases of sexual violence against children that may have occurred in north-east Nigeria;

(i) Strongly condemning attacks on schools and hospitals, the overwhelming majority of which were attributed to Boko Haram, and calling upon all parties to the armed conflict to comply with applicable international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals, including their personnel, 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 as such, in violation of applicable international law, as guided by the Safe Schools Declaration, which was endorsed by the Government of Nigeria in May 2015, and noting the negative effect that attacks on schools and their use can have on the enjoyment of the right to education;

(j) Expressing particular concern that many children in armed conflict, in particular girls, lack access to education owing to, among other things, attacks against schools;

(k) Strongly condemning the abduction of children, mostly girls, in particular by Boko Haram, including for recruitment and use, and forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence, and urging relevant parties, in particular Boko Haram, to immediately cease the abduction of children and all violations and abuses committed against abducted children, including the forced marriage of girls to its fighters, and to immediately release without preconditions all abducted children to relevant civilian child protection actors;

(l) Expressing grave concern at incidents of denial of humanitarian access, including attacks on, abduction and killing of and threats thereof, to humanitarian personnel, and calling upon all parties to the conflict 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 of humanitarian assistance, including 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 agencies and their humanitarian partners, without adverse distinction;

To the Government of Nigeria

(m) Stressing the primary role of the Government in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict in Nigeria and recalling that Nigeria 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;

(n) Noting with appreciation the acknowledgement by the Government of Nigeria of the need to promote accountability and bring justice to victims through its national legislation, and urging it 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 the six grave violations 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, with the best interests of the child as a primary consideration;

(o) Expressing grave concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their or their parents' association or alleged association with Boko Haram, while noting the release by the Nigerian authorities of 1,591 children from detention, urging the Government of Nigeria to immediately release children held in detention and calling upon it to expedite the review and adoption of the protocol for the handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors and emphasizing that children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts should be treated primarily as victims, urging the Government of Nigeria to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular that the arrest, detention and imprisonment of children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in line with international law, and that, in actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration, and calling upon the Government of Nigeria to prioritize the reintegration of such children through family- and community-based reintegration programmes, further calling upon the Government of Nigeria to provide unhindered access to the United Nations to detention facilities and encouraging access of civilian child protection actors to children deprived of liberty for association with armed forces and armed groups;

(p) Welcoming the cooperation of the Government of Nigeria with the country task force on a handover protocol to facilitate the release and handover of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors and urging it to expedite the adoption and ensure the implementation of the protocol;

(q) Welcoming the efforts of the Government of Nigeria leading to the release of abducted children, as well as its efforts, with the support of the United Nations and partners, leading to the reintegration of 3,794 children formerly associated with armed groups, encouraging the Government of Nigeria to continue to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive reintegration of all children released through family- and community-based reintegration programmes, as well as the provision of educational, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict, encouraging the Government of Nigeria to focus on sustainable reintegration opportunities for children affected by armed conflict, in particular those formerly associated with Boko Haram and the victims of abductions, forced marriage and sexual violence, including by raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of such children and facilitating their return while taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys;

(r) Welcoming the establishment of a human rights desk at the Nigerian army headquarters and in Borno State with dedicated child protection capacity to

investigate violations and abuses against children in order to end impunity, and stressing the importance of pursuing efforts towards accountability by investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for the six grave violations against children;

(s) Condemning in the strongest terms rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including sexual exploitation and abuse, by members of security forces and calling upon the Government of Nigeria to ensure full accountability, as well as access to non-discriminatory and comprehensive specialized services, including psychosocial, health, legal and livelihood support and services, to survivors of sexual violence and to take measures to prevent and end violations and abuses;

(t) Recalling the endorsement by the Government of Nigeria of the Safe Schools Declaration while expressing concern about the military use of schools by government forces in violation of its obligations under international law, stressing the importance of access to education and health care for children in Nigeria and calling upon the Government to ensure that schools and related personnel are protected;

To Boko Haram factions

(u) Condemning in the strongest possible terms the continuing violations and abuses committed against children by Boko Haram, and strongly urging Boko Haram to immediately end all violations and abuses against children in Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin and to immediately release without preconditions all children and end and prevent the further recruitment and use of children, including the re-recruitment of children who have been released;

(v) Expressing grave concern at the large numbers of children who have been recruited and used, including through cross-border recruitment, at the use of children as human shields, at the increasing use of girls as carriers of improvised explosive devices and at the large numbers of children killed or maimed, including through attacks in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, as well as at the high number of incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and forced marriage, perpetrated against children by Boko Haram;

(w) Strongly condemning the targeting of schools, the increasing number of attacks on schools and the threats of attacks on schools and their personnel by Boko Haram, including through the burning and total destruction of infrastructure, as well as physical attacks against education personnel that involved, inter alia, the killing and maiming of teachers and pupils, the abduction of children and the detonation of person-borne improvised explosive devices on school premises;

(x) Urging Boko Haram to cease the abduction of children, including cross-border abductions and those specifically targeting girls, and all violations and abuses committed against abducted children, and to immediately release without preconditions all abducted children in its captivity;

(y) Recalling that the Security Council, by its resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#), reaffirmed the asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo affecting all individuals and entities, among them Boko Haram, set out in paragraph 1 of resolution [2083 \(2012\)](#);

(z) Expressing the readiness of the Working Group to communicate to the Security Council and to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities pertinent information with a view to assisting them in the imposition of the sanctions on perpetrators;

To the Civilian Joint Task Force

(aa) Commending the Civilian Joint Task Force for the constructive role that it has played, in cooperation with the Government of Nigeria, in the adoption and implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Task Force, including by facilitating the disengagement of 2,203 boys and girls, welcoming in that regard the importance of the conduct of joint verification missions of the Task Force, the Ministry of Justice of Borno State and the country task force to identify and separate associated children, encouraging the Task Force to fully implement its action plan and facilitate the separation of any remaining associated children and noting that, following the signing of the action plan in 2017, no new recruitment and use of children by the Task Force was verified by the country task force;

(bb) Noting with appreciation that child protection units were established in Task Force sectors, including at the group's headquarters in Maiduguri.

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 and religious leaders in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict;

(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, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abductions, attacks and threats of attacks against schools and hospitals, and to engage with the Government of Nigeria, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to support the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict in 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 Nigeria:

(a) Stressing the primary role of the Government in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict in Nigeria, and recalling that Nigeria 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) Noting with appreciation the acknowledgement by the Government of Nigeria of the need to promote accountability and bring justice to victims through its national legislation (S/2020/652, para. 64) and appealing to it to pursue its efforts towards accountability, including through comprehensive, independent, timely and systematic investigation and, as appropriate, prosecution, conviction and punishment of anyone found to be responsible for the six grave violations against children, and to ensure that all survivors have access to justice as well as to the medical and support services that they need;

(c) Commending the Government of Nigeria for the constructive role that it has played in support of the Civilian Joint Task Force and in the adoption and implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Task Force, including by facilitating the disengagement of 2,203 boys and girls, and calling upon the Government to end and prevent the use of children to carry out menial jobs at some of its armed forces bases;

(d) Expressing grave concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their or their parents' association or alleged association with Boko Haram, while noting the release by the Nigerian authorities of 1,591 children from detention, urging the Government of Nigeria to immediately release children held in detention and calling upon it to expedite the review and adoption of the protocol for the handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors, emphasizing that children who have been recruited in violation of applicable international law by armed forces and armed groups and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflicts should be treated primarily as victims, urging the Government to comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular that the arrest, detention and imprisonment of children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in line with international law, and that, in actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration, calling upon the Government to prioritize their reintegration, further calling upon the Government to provide unhindered access to the United Nations to detention facilities and encouraging access of civilian child protection actors to children deprived of liberty for association with armed forces and armed groups;

(e) Welcoming the cooperation of the Government of Nigeria with the country task force on a handover protocol to facilitate the release and handover of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors, and encouraging it to expedite adoption and ensure implementation;

(f) Welcoming the efforts of the Government of Nigeria leading to the release of abducted children, as well as its efforts, with the support of the United Nations and partners, leading to the reintegration of 3,794 children formerly associated with armed groups, encouraging the Government to continue to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive reintegration of all children released, as well as the provision of educational, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict, encouraging the Government to focus on sustainable reintegration opportunities for children affected by armed conflict, in particular those formerly associated with Boko Haram and the victims of abductions, forced marriage and sexual violence, including by raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of such children and facilitating their return, while taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys;

(g) Welcoming the establishment of a human rights desk at the Nigerian army headquarters and in Borno State with dedicated child protection capacity to investigate the six grave violations against children in order to end impunity, and stressing the importance of pursuing efforts towards accountability by investigating and, as appropriate, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for grave violations and abuses against children;

(h) Condemning in the strongest terms rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, by members of security forces, and calling upon the Government of Nigeria to ensure accountability as well as access to non-discriminatory and comprehensive specialized services, including psychosocial, health, legal and livelihood support services, to survivors of sexual violence;

(i) Recalling the endorsement of the Government of Nigeria of the Safe Schools Declaration while expressing concern about the military use of schools by government forces in violation of its obligations under international law, stressing the importance of access to education and health care for children in Nigeria and calling upon the Government to ensure that schools and related personnel are protected;

8. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter 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 Nigeria;

(b) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that the United Nations 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 to continue engagement with the Civilian Joint Task Force to fully implement its action plan and facilitate the release of any remaining associated children;

(c) Noting the negative impact of conflict on children in regions of countries bordering north-east Nigeria, and inviting the Secretary-General in that regard to report on relevant developments, as appropriate, through his regular reporting to provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation of children affected by the conflict.

9. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter from the Chair of the Working Group addressed to the President of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission:

(a) Welcoming the commitments made by the African Union and the Multinational Joint Task Force to peace and security in Nigeria and neighbouring countries affected by the actions of Boko Haram and to the protection of children affected by armed conflict;

(b) Stressing the need for all military action against Boko Haram to be conducted in compliance with international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined therein;

(c) Encouraging Multinational Joint Task Force-contributing countries to continue to cooperate with the United Nations regarding child protection issues;

(d) Strongly encouraging the Peace and Security Council to include in the mandate of the Multinational Joint Task Force specific provisions for the protection of children, encouraging the Task Force to issue a Force Commander's directive on the protection of children encountered during military operations, including their handover to civilian child protection authorities for appropriate assistance and protection, and emphasizing that children who have been recruited in violation of applicable international law by armed forces and armed groups should be treated primarily as victims and that, in actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration;

(e) Encouraging the Multinational Joint Task Force to deploy child protection officers or designate child protection focal points within the Task Force to contribute to training, capacity-building and advocacy regarding violations and abuses committed against children.

10. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities:

(a) Recalling paragraph 7 (b) of resolution [1882 \(2009\)](#), by which the Council requested enhanced communication between the Working Group and relevant Council sanctions committees, including through the exchange of pertinent information on violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict;

(b) Encouraging the continued sharing of relevant information by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict with the Committee and the Working Group;

(c) Encouraging the Committee to continue to consider the designation for sanctions of individuals and entities, in accordance with the rules and guidelines of the Committee.

Direct action by the Working Group

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

(a) Stressing the critical needs of children in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, and calling upon donors to support the Government of Nigeria in developing and implementing national policies, programmes and initiatives to enhance the protection of children;

(b) Requesting in this regard donors to provide flexible, predictable and adequate funding and support to the Government of Nigeria and relevant humanitarian and development partners to strengthen child protection efforts, including:

(i) The development and implementation of sustainable multisectoral reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed groups;

(ii) The bolstering of systems providing access to appropriate education and vocational training, as well as health care and nutrition for all children affected by armed conflict;

(iii) The establishment of birth and late birth registration as a means to prevent the recruitment and use of children, in violation of applicable international law in Nigeria;

(iv) The development and implementation of sustainable long-term strategies to end and prevent all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict in Nigeria, as well as programming and research on preventing the recruitment and radicalization of children and youth;

(v) The development and implementation of sustainable long-term strategies to end and prevent sexual and gender-based violence against children in armed conflict in Nigeria, including by addressing safe reporting mechanisms, stigma and retaliatory attacks, discrimination by service providers and community members and the specific health and psychosocial needs of girls who have been victims of sexual violence during their captivity by Boko Haram and of children born as a result of rape and their mothers;

(vi) The provision of technical assistance to build and strengthen the protection and response capacity of child protection personnel at the governmental and non-governmental levels;

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

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

The Nigerian Government does not involve in the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in any form whatsoever. The Nigerian Government does not abduct children and does not engage in other forms of violations against children, either in the context of conflict or in any other context. It is inconceivable that the Nigerian Government would be considered a grave violator of the rights of children. To even contemplate categorizing Nigeria as such, one would have to turn the rule of evidence on its head. This report, therefore, does a disservice to the tireless efforts of the Government of Nigeria in promoting and protecting the rights of children, not so much in what it says against the Nigerian Government as it is in the image it creates about the Nigerian Government. For the undiscerning mind, this report creates a false and jaundiced reality about the Nigerian Government. Accordingly, the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria rejects it and would therefore prefer that it were never written, even in its draft form.

Nevertheless, since the draft report is being discussed today, I consider it my solemn duty to respond to the unfortunate report that is before us. So, let me begin by expressing my thanks to you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me to this exchange in order to present my Government's response. I should also like to thank the SRSB-CAAC and her Office for following the hallowed practice of sharing with affected countries relevant excerpts for comments before the publication of the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. This is a practice that Nigeria deeply appreciates, given its potential for ensuring a fair and balanced report.

Mr. Chair,

I would like to reiterate Nigeria's principled stance for the promotion and the protection of the rights of children no matter the circumstance. For Nigeria, these rights are sacrosanct and non-negotiable. This is the reason Nigeria continues to strive to place the interests of children first and to create a world that is truly fit for children.

As a signatory to the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" as well as the "Optional Protocol on Children's Involvement in Armed Conflicts," Nigeria does not engage in the recruitment of children into its armed forces. On the contrary, Nigeria continues to ensure that children who are or have been unlawfully recruited or used by armed groups are not victimized anew by the law. That is why Nigeria treats children in armed conflicts, no matter their role, as victims who need to be rescued, rehabilitated, and reintegrated in society, rather than as being in conflict with the Nigerian law. Nigeria will, therefore, continue to uphold its commitment to the relevant international conventions and protocols that protect and promote the fundamental and inalienable rights of children.

As it relates to the specifics of the draft report before us, let me observe that its stated objective is to provide "information related to the six grave violations against children in the context of the armed conflict in north-east Nigeria," specifically in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States, during the period from January 2017 to December 2020. In my Government's view, strict adherence to the stated objective as well as to conceptual clarity, scope, and delimitation remains the hallmark of good reporting and are necessary for providing a fair, balanced, unbiased and factual report that is

* The present annex is being issued without formal editing.

neither sensational nor inadvertently detrimental to its cause or to the image of the affected State.

While the draft has generally tried to limit itself to activities within the reporting period, it has, nonetheless, sometimes strayed from the January 2017 to December 2019 period. My Government believes that, however well-intentioned these time travels might be, the digressions do a disservice to both the report and to Nigeria. Accordingly, my Government strongly disagrees with the inclusion of any data outside the reporting period and requests their deletions.

Similarly, my Government also notes that the report does not limit itself to north-east Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States) but also includes what it terms “spillovers” into the neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Nigeria. In this regard, my Government holds the strong view that such inclusion of “spillovers” does not serve the interest of fairness. They unduly intensify the reality in Nigeria and give a negatively skewed picture of what the truth is in the three States under consideration.

Furthermore, the very concept of “spillover” begs the question of precise definition (is it what begins in Nigeria and flows to other countries or vice versa?), risks becoming a slippery slope (at what point does speak of “spillover”? Is it at the planning stage of the violation or at the execution stage or both?), and poses the very real and legitimate problem of attribution (how can one be sure of the specific violator in the context of spillovers, particularly when one considers “spillovers” in relation to both the planning and execution stages of criminal violations against children). The question of “spillover” is even compounded by the fact that Boko Haram – the merchant of evil on children - is transnational, planning its dastardly activities in different countries and implementing them across borders. Accordingly, my Government requests that all references to “spillovers” and alleged cases that are not within the confines of the three States be expunged. Specifically, my Government requests the revision of the Summary and paragraph 1 as well as the complete deletion of paragraphs 26, 35, 41, 52, 55, and 60, amongst other references of a similar nature.

My Government also notes the reference to “unverified” cases. If unverified, then it is speculative. Such a sensitive report as this one on “grave violations against children” cannot afford to include references to unverified speculations. Again, in the interest of the principle of fairness, my Government requests that such unverified cases, as contained in paragraphs 36, 44, and 53, for example, be expunged from the report.

My Government also considers the reference to the general elections in 2019, which led to the misspelling of the first name of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as both irrelevant and dangerous. It does not shed any light upon the situation of children in armed conflict in Nigeria. However, by its very inclusion, it seems to suggest that the general elections might have triggered an uptick in grave violations against children. In view of this patently unwarranted insinuation, my Government requests the deletion of paragraph 4, because an overview of the political situation can still be given without referring to the 2019 general elections.

When it comes to the recruitment and use of children, my Government completely and categorically rejects the idea that the Nigerian Security Forces (NSF) were involved in the recruitment of children. The draft itself does not support it. The Office of the SRSR-CAAC knows only too well that the NSF, as a matter of both principle and practice, do not recruit children. On the contrary, the NSF are consistently involved in the difficult, yet necessary, task of rescuing, deradicalizing, rehabilitating and reintegrating children, as amply attested to in paragraphs 33 and 34 of the draft.

It is therefore curious to see in paragraph 30 that “The cases attributed to the NSF involved the use of 13 children (2 girls, 11 boys) for menial jobs at military checkpoints during 2019.” The claim that the NSF used children for “menial jobs” seems to be a contrived and disingenuous manner of attributing the recruitment and use of children to the NSF. This is a rather peculiar definition of “recruitment and use of children in armed conflict,” which does not seem to serve the interest of accuracy and fairness. What constitutes “menial jobs”? Assuming that “menial jobs” in the context of the report could be defined coherently and precisely, how does the use of children for “menial jobs” constitute “recruitment and use of children for armed conflict”? Accordingly, my Government requests the deletion of paragraph 30, because, by seeming to trivialize the meaning of the grave violation the recruitment and use of children constitutes, it unfairly accuses the NSF of the commission of a heinous crime of which they have not been shown to be guilty.

Importantly, Nigeria has also always taken decisive measures and actions to protect children in armed conflict, by ensuring that all those kidnapped and abducted by Boko Haram insurgents are returned and reintegrated into the society. Thus, allegations that children were recruited and used by the NSF is absurd, especially given that it is completely illegal for the NSF to use children for military purposes. Nonetheless, it is important to inform that Government has always been prompt in investigating and punishing allegations of violations, where culpability has been determined. In point of fact, arrested Boko Haram suspects who were accused of having subjected girls to sexual and gender-based violence, including forced marriages and rape have been prosecuted.

On humanitarian access, my Government does not deny any passage for the delivery of humanitarian aid in line with international humanitarian law. It has rather facilitated access and security to NGOs and entities that comply with established national laws and standard protocols, as well as international law and principles. Nigeria is of the view that those who make these unsubstantiated claims are part of those sympathetic to Boko Haram, who not only provide them with supplies but also critical information that undermine the fight against terrorism. In this regard, it would be recalled that in September 2019, some High-Level Nigerian Security Officials met with UN Representatives and provided proof that some NGOs were providing supplies to terrorists in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, in contravention of Nigerian laws and international humanitarian law.

Relatedly, my Government also notes with great concern the allegation of extortion levelled against the NSF in the context of facilitating and granting access for humanitarian activities. Paragraph 59 alleges that the NSF were involved in “undue demands for money in return for passage.” However, given that the draft does not state whether or not the allegation was verified, it is important to know if this is a verified claim or if it is an unverified anecdote that has no place in such a serious report as this. If the latter, my Government requests its immediate deletion.

Furthermore, the ridiculous and unverified attribution of attacks on schools to the Nigerian government is illogical. It is imperative to state that the Government of Nigeria remains resolute in ensuring that children stay in schools by protecting education from attack and providing safe and conducive environment for learning. Within the reporting period, government spent huge resources in rebuilding schools and hospitals destroyed by Boko Haram insurgents in order to ensure that children affected by the conflict are not deprived of basic education. Indeed, to underline its commitment to the proposition that education must continue for its children even in emergency situations, the Government of Nigeria developed an education in Emergency curriculum aimed not only at realizing the right of every Nigerian child to education but also aimed at ensuring that children studying in emergency situations can be mainstreamed into the formal school system when their condition normalizes.

It might interest you to know that, only recently, the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria announced that it would host the 4th International Conference on Safe Schools next year, 2021, in order to promote the Safe Schools Declaration and canvass for the non-use of schools and other educational facilities for military purposes. It is, therefore, incongruous that a Government that has demonstrated such commitment to and provided huge resources towards the protection of schools, the rebuilding of schools destroyed by Boko Haram, and the provision of education in emergency situations, both nationally and internationally, would, itself, be destroying schools. It just does not add up.

As it relates to the alleged violations by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), my Government observes that most of the cases referred to the CJTF are outside of the reporting period, even though it is claimed that the cases were verified during the reporting period. "Verification during the reporting period" is clearly different from "observation during the reporting period," the former not worthy of inclusion in contradistinction to the latter. Consequently, verification during the reporting period cannot be the basis for the inclusion of incidents that allegedly happened outside of the reporting period. Inclusion of extraneous allegations or data runs the very real risk of arbitrariness in service of ill-defined objectives.

In truth, if the aim of the report is to provide information concerning violations that allegedly happened during a given time period, then that objective is undermined by including data from another time period, in what could be perceived as an artificial means of bloating the figures to give an increasingly negative picture. For Nigeria, one violation against any child is already bad enough, and there is no need to import data to prove the grievousness of the violations. In this regard, my Government requests the revision of paragraph 22, the deletion of paragraph 28, and the possible merger of paragraphs 27 and 29.

Mr. Chair,

As I conclude, I would like to reiterate commitment of the Nigerian Government to the promotion and protection of the rights of every child. Our children represent our hope. They represent our joy. They represent our future. They also typify vulnerability. And, perhaps, vulnerability knows no greater visibility than a child who has been violently deprived of his or her innocence. Violence against children as well as the phenomenon of children and armed conflict is not only traumatic for the affected children but also constitute a tragedy for the world. Accordingly, we, as members of the civilized world, must do whatever it takes to extricate children from the shackles and consequences of this evil. We must rescue, rehabilitate, resettle, and reintegrate children affected by conflict. This is what Nigeria does, has been doing, and continues to do.

In light of the foregoing, this report dishonours the good name of Nigeria. If published, it would constitute a lack of recognition of Nigeria's invaluable contributions towards the protection of children from attack. The Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, therefore, strongly opposes its publication.

Thank you.
