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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 eighth report on the situation of children and armed conflict in the Sudan and covers the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in the Sudan, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations against children, namely the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals,^a the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access. Where available, the report contains information on perpetrators. It also outlines the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through dialogue with parties.

The report provides 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.

^a For the purposes of the present report the phrase “protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals”, used in Security Council resolutions [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#) as well as in the statements by the President of the Security Council of 17 June 2013 ([S/PRST/2013/8](#)) and 31 October 2017 ([S/PRST/2017/21](#)), refers to teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.



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 2022 to 31 December 2023. It is the eighth 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 provides details of the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2022/627](#)) 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.51/2022/6](#)). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the engagement with parties to the conflict and the implementation of action plans and road maps. Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations are identified.

2. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/78/842-S/2024/384](#)), seven 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 Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction (SPLM-N al-Hilu), the SPLM-N Malik Agar faction (SPLM-N Malik Agar), and the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW), and the Third Front-Tamazuj has been newly listed for the recruitment and use of children. The armed group Rapid Support Forces has been newly listed for the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children and for rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, as well as for attacks on schools and hospitals. The Sudanese Armed Forces have been newly listed for the killing and maiming of children and for attacks on schools and hospitals. JEM, SLA/MM, SPLM-N al-Hilu and SPLM-N Malik Agar have signed action plans with the United Nations.

3. 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 Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Challenges relating to insecurity in and access to conflict-affected areas, access restrictions imposed by parties to conflict, as well as prolonged communications blackouts in some areas, significantly hampered the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. Therefore, the information contained in the report does not represent the full extent of the 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, security and humanitarian developments

4. The political situation in the Sudan remained deadlocked throughout 2022 following the resignation of the Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok on 2 January 2022. Against this backdrop, domestic and international efforts to facilitate a political process to restore the democratic transition continued. Neighbourhood resistance committees continued to organize regular protests across the country. Although most protests were peaceful and the protesters unarmed, security forces consistently used live ammunition, tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse protesters.

5. On 5 December 2022, the military leadership and over 40 political parties, armed movements that were signatories to the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan, trade unions and professional associations signed a political framework agreement in Khartoum. The framework agreement stipulated a two-year transition period under a democratic, civilian authority. It also outlined the general principles of a political settlement, provided for steps to be taken during the transition and proposed the formation of fully civilian institutions.
6. On 15 April 2023, the situation in the Sudan deteriorated markedly when fighting erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. The Sudan has since faced an unprecedented period characterized by intense fighting, the widespread deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the collapse of the vision of a peaceful political transition from military to civilian rule. The rapid escalation of hostilities in the Sudan has had a dramatic impact on children, who were already severely affected by the country's long-lasting and devastating conflicts and the dire humanitarian situation. For example, air strikes by the Sudanese Armed Forces against the Rapid Support Forces in Nyala, South Darfur in December 2023 led to the killing and maiming of 15 children. In another instance, in August 2023, incursions and artillery shelling by the Rapid Support Forces into Al Rahad and Umm Rawaba localities in North Kordofan resulted in the killing and maiming of 36 children.
7. On 3 July 2023, the Sudanese Armed Forces instructed its commanders to include in their ranks and equip civilians as recruits in response to a call by the Commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Abdel-Fattah Al-Burhan, for civilians to join the Sudanese Armed Forces (in a branch termed the Sudanese Popular Resistance Factions). Meanwhile, the Rapid Support Forces welcomed the military support of seven tribal leaders in Darfur, who called upon their members to fight for the Rapid Support Forces and called upon other native administration leaders to also support the Rapid Support Forces. In the context of an increase in the recruitment and use of children between 2022 and 2023, both calls raised concerns of children being recruited and used by parties to the conflict.
8. As of December 2023, Khartoum and the adjacent cities of Omdurman and Bahri remained the epicentres of the violence. The Rapid Support Forces has extended its control to four of Darfur's five states, except for North Darfur, where fighting reportedly continued, most notably in and around El Fasher. In December 2023, the Rapid Support Forces also captured Al-Gazira State, further solidifying territorial gains, while the Sudanese Armed Forces remained in control of the northern and eastern parts of the country and most of the three Kordofan States and Blue Nile State. Clashes between SPLM-N al-Hilu faction and the Sudanese Armed Forces in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States further destabilized the Sudan. Regional and international diplomatic initiatives were unsuccessful in halting the fighting, as both sides remained intent on achieving a military victory.
9. In addition, throughout the reporting period, intercommunal clashes, at times with the participation of parties to conflict, including the Sudanese Armed Forces, SLA/AW, the Rapid Support Forces and Arab militia affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces, continued to cause child casualties and population displacement in the Darfur States and in Blue Nile and West Kordofan States. For example, intercommunal violence in South Darfur, notably between the Beni Halba and Salamat communities, resulted in the killing and maiming of 46 children and triggered displacement that further affected children's physical and mental health, exposing them to risks of family separation, sexual violence and recruitment and use by armed groups.
10. Previously existing protection mechanisms have been significantly affected since the onset of the conflict on 15 April 2023. Many of the institutions established to protect children and to follow-up on the implementation of child protection laws,

including for coordinating and monitoring the situation of child rights, ceased to function or were functioning with extremely constrained capacity in limited areas of the country. In addition to widespread insecurity, the suspension of operations by institutions imposed further barriers on children for the reporting of grave violations. Efforts to seek accountability were hampered by a breakdown of the rule of law in the Sudan as of April 2023. Some perpetrators accused or convicted of crimes against children were released, local police forces were dissolved and police stations ceased to be operational.

11. At the end of 2023, over 5.9 million people, including 4 million children, were internally displaced and 1.5 million people, half of whom are children, had fled to neighbouring countries. About half of the Sudanese population – 24.7 million people, including 14 million children – were in need of humanitarian aid and protection assistance, lacking access to food, water, shelter, electricity, education and health care. About 3.5 million children under the age of 5 were acutely malnourished, and an estimated 70 to 80 per cent of medical facilities in conflict-affected areas were non-functional. In addition, an estimated 19 million children in the Sudan were out of school, including 6.5 million children who were unable to gain access to schools owing to violence and insecurity.

12. Following a letter from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/884), in which the Government of the Sudan requested the termination of the mandate of UNITAMS, on 1 December 2023 the Security Council, in its resolution 2715 (2023), decided to terminate the mandate of UNITAMS as of 3 December 2023, and requested the Mission to immediately start on 4 December the cessation of its operations and the process of the transfer of its tasks, where appropriate and to the extent feasible, to United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. The Council also decided that the liquidation of UNITAMS would commence on 1 March 2024. The closure of UNITAMS is likely to significantly affect the monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children and related child protection activities in the Sudan, including the engagement with parties to the conflict on child protection matters, as a result of the capacity gap left by the withdrawal of UNITAMS dedicated child protection staff.

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

13. On 6 September 2023, Lieutenant General Abdel-Fattah Al-Burhan, in his capacity as President of the Transitional Sovereign Council and Commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces, issued two decrees effectively removing the Rapid Support Forces from the Sudanese defence forces, declaring the Rapid Support Forces a rebel militia. The decrees overturned the 2017 law and its associated 2019 amendments, which had incorporated the Rapid Support Forces as an independent armed actor into the Sudanese Armed Forces.

14. Hence, at the end of the reporting period, the Sudanese Armed Forces consisted 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 Sudanese Armed Forces Military Intelligence. The security forces included the Sudanese Police Force and the Central Reserve Police.

15. In Darfur, the Joint Force of Armed Struggle Movements (JFASM) was established in the third quarter of 2023. JFASM was comprised of the following armed groups: Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA/MM), Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Transitional Council (SLM/A-TC), the Gathering of the Sudan Liberation Forces, JEM and the Sudanese Alliance. SLA/MM had overall command.

In public statements, JFASM described itself as a neutral party and did not align itself with either the Sudanese Armed Forces or the Rapid Support Forces. SLA/AW has similarly maintained a neutral stance.

16. However, by the end of 2023, JEM, SLA/MM and SPLM-N Malik Agar had publicly ended their neutrality in the war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. SPLM-N Malik Agar encouraged their members in Blue Nile State to support the Sudanese Armed Forces, following Malik Agar's appointment by Lieutenant General Al-Burhan as Vice-President of the Transitional Sovereign Council, replacing Lieutenant General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

17. The SPLM-N al-Hilu faction continued to hold territories in Blue Nile and in the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan State. Clashes between the SPLM-N al-Hilu faction and the Sudanese Armed Forces in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States further destabilized the Sudan. During the reporting period, the peace dialogue between Sudanese authorities and the SPLM-N al-Hilu faction remained stalled.

18. The Third Front-Tamazuj is one of the factions of SPLM and a signatory to the Juba Peace Agreement. The group has a presence on the border area between the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic.

IV. Grave violations against children

19. The country task force verified 2,168 grave violations against 1,913 children (1,015 boys, 683 girls, 215 sex unknown). Of these, 447 violations occurred in 2022 and 1,721 occurred in 2023. Owing to significant access constraints, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the Sudan. Yet, the over 285 per cent increase in grave violations, from 2022 to 2023, and the fact that 72 per cent of the total of verified violations occurred between April and December 2023 is testament to the dramatic impact of the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces on children.

20. A total of 74 children (56 boys, 18 girls) were victims of multiple violations: recruitment and use and killing (54 boys), abduction and sexual violence (8 girls), sexual violence and killing and maiming (8 girls), abduction and killing and maiming (2 boys, 1 girl), abduction, sexual violence and maiming (1 girl).

21. Violations were verified in South Darfur (661), North Darfur (444), Khartoum (354), North Kordofan (208), West Darfur (158), Blue Nile (137), Central Darfur (124), South Kordofan (31), West Kordofan (23), East Darfur (14), Al-Gazira (11) and White Nile (3) States. As in the previous reporting period ([S/2022/627](#)), children in the Darfur States remained the most severely affected, with 65 per cent of all violations verified in the region.

22. Grave violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (1,426), including during crossfire between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (813) and caused by explosive ordnance (88), the Rapid Support Forces (341), the Sudanese Armed Forces (160), the Third Front-Tamazuj (90), the Sudanese Alliance (34), the Gathering of the Sudan Liberation Forces (31), Arab militia affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces (19), SPLM-N Malik Agar (17), SLA/MM (10), the Sudanese Police Force (9), jointly by the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLM-N al-Hilu (7), SLA/AW (5), the Sudanese Armed Forces Military Intelligence (4), the Chadian National Army (4), SPLM-N al-Hilu (4), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Yassir Arman (SPLM-N Yassir Arman) (1), the Joint Security-Keeping Force (1), jointly by the Sudanese Armed Forces and SLA/AW (1), SLM/A-TC (1), jointly by the Rapid Support Forces and Arab militia affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces (1) and JEM (1).

23. In addition, the country task force verified 15 grave violations against 15 children (9 boys, 6 girls) that occurred prior to 2022: recruitment and use (8 boys, 5 girls), sexual violence (1 girl) and maiming (1 boy).

A. Recruitment and use

24. The recruitment and use of 277 children (233 boys, 44 girls) was verified. Of that total, 68 incidents occurred in 2022 and 209 occurred in 2023. Some 35 children were below the age of 15, while the youngest boy had been used by the Third Front-Tamazuj in a support role since the age of 7.

25. Incidents of recruitment and use were attributed to the Third Front-Tamazuj (90), the Rapid Support Forces (87), the Sudanese Alliance (34), the Gathering of the Sudan Liberation Forces (31), SPLM-N Malik Agar (17), SLA/MM (8), the Sudanese Police Force (4), the Sudanese Armed Forces (2), SPLM-N Yassir Arman (1), JEM (1), the Joint Security-Keeping Force (1) and SLM/A-TC (1).

26. Some 95 per cent of cases of recruitment and use occurred in the Darfur States. Instances were verified in North Darfur (156), South Darfur (57), West Darfur (30), Central Darfur (20), Khartoum (10) and South Kordofan (4). Push factors driving the recruitment and use of children included children having been separated from their families, and poverty. Among recruited children, 53 reported being out of school, 2 were girls who had never attended school prior to their recruitment and 17 were children who had left after primary school.

27. Children were used in combat roles (152), including to guard checkpoints (40), in support roles (114) and for unknown purposes (11). All children used in combat were boys and 56 were killed in combat, whereas girls were used in support roles.

28. Eight boys who were associated with an armed group were used by multiple armed groups. For example, 3 boys, aged 16 and 17, were recruited and used by the Gathering of the Sudan Liberation Forces (2) and SLM/A-TC (1). The 3 boys were verified to also have been used in combat roles in Libya by local armed groups. The boys have since returned to the Sudan and were reunified with their families following their release. In another instance, the country task force verified the recruitment and use of a 15-year-old boy who was recruited by SLA/MM at the age of 12. During his association with SLA/MM he was also used by SPLM-N Malik Agar to guard checkpoints and fetch water.

29. The United Nations supported the release of 122 children (90 boys, 32 girls) in North Darfur, who were associated with the Third Front-Tamazuj (63), the Gathering of the Sudan Liberation Forces (36), SLA/MM (10), SPLM-N Malik Agar (8), SLM/A-TC (2), the Joint Security-Keeping Force (1), the Sudanese Armed Forces (1) and SPLM-N Yassir Arman (1). The children were released following screening missions by the country task force in October 2022 and early 2023.

30. In addition, the country task force verified the recruitment and use of 13 children (8 boys, 5 girls) by SPLM-N Malik Agar (7), the Third Front-Tamazuj (4), the Gathering of the Sudan Liberation Forces (1) and SLA/MM (1) in North Darfur (13). Those children were recruited and used in 2015 (1), 2016 (1), 2019 (1), 2020 (8) and 2021 (2).

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

31. A total of 51 boys were detained for alleged association with armed groups and on national security grounds during the reporting period. Of that number, 47 boys were deprived of liberty by the Rapid Support Forces for allegedly serving as spies for the Sudanese Armed Forces, and 4 boys were detained by the Sudanese Armed Forces for allegedly serving in combat for the Rapid Support Forces.

32. In September 2023, the Sudanese Armed Forces released from detention the 4 boys who had reportedly been used in combat by the Rapid Support Forces and had been detained by the Sudanese Armed Forces following fighting in Khartoum. The country task force and the State Council for Child Welfare in Kassala assessed the ages of the children. All 4 were reunified with their families. Upon their release, the children were in poor health. All children received health, psychosocial and family tracing support, which was overseen by the State Council for Child Welfare.

33. In December 2023, following an intervention by the country task force, the Rapid Support Forces handed over to a protection partner the 47 boys who had been detained for allegedly serving as spies for the Sudanese Armed Forces in West Darfur, following an age assessment. The boys received multisectoral assistance, including psychosocial and family tracing support from UNICEF and partners, before being reunified with their families.

B. Killing and maiming

34. The country task force verified the killing (611) and maiming (914) of 1,525 children (825 boys, 485 girls, 215 sex unknown). Of these, 281 children were killed or maimed in 2022 and 1,244 in 2023. The children killed or maimed ranged in age from infants to 17-years-old, with most children being above the age of 10.

35. Violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (1,230), including during crossfire between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (813) and due to explosive ordnance (88), the Sudanese Armed Forces (143), the Rapid Support Forces (137), jointly by the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLM-N al-Hilu (7), Arab militia affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces (3), SPLM-N al-Hilu (2), SLA/AW (1), jointly by the Rapid Support Forces and Arab militia affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces (1), the Sudanese Police Force (1) and jointly by the Sudanese Armed Forces and SLA/AW (1).

36. Violations were verified in South Darfur (533), Khartoum (267), North Darfur (208), North Kordofan (203), Blue Nile (136), West Darfur (64), Central Darfur (58), West Kordofan (21), South Kordofan (18), East Darfur (10), Al-Gazira (4) and White Nile (3) States.

37. Notably, 74 per cent of incidents involving explosive ordnance affected boys. These occurred mostly when boys encountered explosive ordnance while playing or carrying out domestic chores, such as herding livestock. For example, in April 2022, 4 boys were affected: 3 were killed and 1 was maimed by an explosive remnant of war in East Darfur. The boys were grazing livestock when they found the explosive object. Unable to identify it as a deadly hazard, they proceeded to hit it with sticks, triggering an explosion. The maimed child sustained serious injuries to both legs and his left hand had to be amputated.

38. Girls experienced beatings and physical assault at a higher rate, often during incidents that also involved sexual violence. For example, in February 2023, 4 girls, between the ages of 14 and 17, were beaten with sticks and raped by unidentified

perpetrators when they collected firewood and grass near a camp internally displaced persons in North Darfur.

39. Intercommunal violence continued to affect the lives of children, particularly between January 2022 and April 2023. As noted in the previous report (S/2022/627), about half of all child casualties during this timeframe occurred in the context of intercommunal violence, often owing to conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, mostly in the Darfur States or Blue Nile State. For example, following the escalation of tensions due to the unresolved disputes over land ownership and representation in the native administration system in Blue Nile State, violence erupted between Hausa and Jabalaween tribes, causing the killing, destruction and looting of properties and the displacement of at least 800 families, including children, from the affected villages in October 2022. In total, 126 children were killed or maimed during this violent episode.

40. The onset of fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces on 15 April 2023 marked a significant change in the conflict dynamics in the Sudan. Of all child casualties verified during the reporting period, 81 per cent (1,231) occurred in the last eight months of 2023. Among these, only 4 per cent of instances occurred during intercommunal violence. It is unclear, however, whether this was as a result of an actual reduction in intercommunal violence or access restrictions for monitors. Most child casualties since April 2023 were caused by crossfire (813), followed by aerial bombardment (129) and shelling (123).

41. For example, during fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in South Darfur in April 2023, 3 siblings (2 girls, 1 boy), between the ages of 8 and 12, were maimed when a shell fell on their house. One of the girls suffered serious burns to her back, hands and legs. All three children received medical treatment.

42. In another instance, in September 2023, 2 boys were killed in crossfire between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces during artillery shelling of a public transportation station in Omdurman, Khartoum, from where they were scheduled to travel to River Nile State as they fled the violence in Khartoum.

43. In addition, the country task force verified the maiming of 1 boy by unidentified perpetrators, which occurred in South Darfur in 2021.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

44. The country task force verified sexual violence against 153 girls between the ages of 9 and 17. Of these, 39 incidents occurred in 2022 and 114 occurred in 2023.

45. Violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (67), the Rapid Support Forces (63), Arab militia affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces (15), the Chadian National Army (4), SLA/AW (2) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (2).

46. Violations were verified in North Darfur (37), Khartoum (30), West Darfur (28), South Darfur (27), Central Darfur (27), South Kordofan (2), East Darfur (1) and North Kordofan (1).

47. Despite its high prevalence in the Sudan, sexual violence remained underreported. Survivors feared reprisals and often experienced blame and alienation from their communities. Moreover, with 70 to 80 per cent of health facilities in conflict-affected areas being either inaccessible or not operational, it is likely that reports of sexual violence have further decreased, as survivors have fewer opportunities to seek support. Increased insecurity during movement within the country has further heightened barriers to services.

48. In addition, accountability for sexual violence in the Sudan remained very low. During the reporting period, only 11 perpetrators from the Chadian National Army, the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces and SLA/AW were investigated, prosecuted, detained or arrested for sexual violence against girls.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

49. The country task force verified 118 attacks on schools (30) and hospitals (88). Of these 33 occurred in 2022 and 85 occurred in 2023. Six of the attacked hospitals were subsequently used for military purposes.

50. Attacks were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (62), the Rapid Support Forces (38), the Sudanese Armed Forces (11), the Sudanese Armed Forces Military Intelligence (1), the Sudanese Police Force (3), SPLM-N al-Hilu (1), the Joint Security-Keeping Force (1) and SLA/MM (1).

51. Incidents were verified in Khartoum (36), North Darfur (23), West Darfur (21), South Darfur (16), Central Darfur (7), South Kordofan (6), North Kordofan (4), Al-Gazira (2), Blue Nile (1), West Kordofan (1) and East Darfur (1) States.

52. Schools and hospitals were damaged or destroyed through looting (33), shelling/shooting (26), burning (12), aerial missile and drone attacks (7), the use of tear gas (1) and by unknown means (22). Some 17 attacks involved threats and/or violence against 32 protected personnel: killing (9), abduction (7), detention (6), maiming (4), physical assault (4) and verbal threats (2).

53. Nearly all attacks on schools and hospitals attributed to the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces occurred in 2023. For example, in October 2023, clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in South Darfur resulted in damage to 3 hospitals and the looting of another 5 hospitals.

54. As a result of the damage, destruction, military use or closure of hospitals verified by the country task force, an estimated 3.3 million individuals – nearly half of whom were children – did not have access to essential medical care by the end of the reporting period.

55. Since the onset of the current conflict, an estimated 19 million children in the Sudan have been out of school compared with approximately 7 million children who were out of school prior to April 2023. At least 10,400 schools were closed in conflict-affected areas.

Military use of schools and hospitals

56. The country task force verified the military use of 49 schools (38) and hospitals (11) by the Rapid Support Forces (27), the Sudanese Armed Forces (11), unidentified perpetrators (7), SLA/AW (2), the Central Reserve Police (1) and JEM (1). Of these, 11 incidents were verified in 2022 and 38 were verified in 2023.

57. The military use of schools and hospitals was verified in North Darfur (14), Central Darfur (13), West Darfur (9), Khartoum (6), South Darfur (4), Blue Nile (1), East Darfur (1) and North Kordofan (1).

58. Schools and hospitals were used, inter alia, as command posts (3), military bases (2), field hospitals (1), offices/detention centre (1), barracks (1) or for defensive positioning (1). For example, in August 2023, the Rapid Support Forces occupied a primary school in a village in Central Darfur and the only health facility in the village was destroyed during an attack by the Rapid Support Forces. Children in the village faced significant challenges in receiving medical treatment outside the village owing

to insecurity and restrictions of movement imposed on them by the Rapid Support Forces, who requested the payment of fees from those leaving to seek medical care.

E. Abduction

59. The country task force verified the abduction of 33 children (14 boys, 19 girls), between the ages of 9 and 17. Of these, 13 abductions occurred in 2022 and 20 occurred in 2023.

60. Violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (20), the Rapid Support Forces (11), the Sudanese Armed Forces (1) and Arab militia affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces (1).

61. Violations occurred in North Darfur (14), South Darfur (6), West Darfur (4), Khartoum (3), Al-Gazira (3), Central Darfur (2) and East Darfur (1).

62. Among the 33 children abducted, 12 experienced multiple violations after being abducted, including sexual violence (8 girls), killing (1 boy), maiming (1 girl, 1 boy) or both maiming and sexual violence (1 girl).

63. Children were abducted for the purpose of ransom, extortion or retaliation (9), sexual violence (5), forced labour (1), and unknown reasons (18). The length of abduction varied, with some children being held for less than a day while others were held for over two years. In most cases, children were abducted during livelihood activities, such as farming (8) or selling water (1), or on their way to school (1), visiting the market (1) or on the way to the hospital (1). Some children were abducted close to their homes (6) or at checkpoints (3).

64. Twelve incidents of abduction occurred in the context of intercommunal violence. For example, in August 2022 in North Darfur, unidentified perpetrators abducted 9 persons, including 4 children (2 boys, 2 girls) from their farms, claiming the farmers had stolen their camels. The case was reported to the Joint Security-Keeping Force, who found the lost camels and secured the release of the abducted persons.

65. Approximately 25 per cent of abductions were attributed to the Rapid Support Forces, almost all of which occurred between July and December 2023. For example, in three separate incidents, the Rapid Support Forces abducted three boys, between the ages of 14 and 17, when they passed a checkpoint. Of the three, one was held for ransom before being killed, one was tortured before being released and the whereabouts of the third boy remain unknown. In another instance, in July 2023, two sisters aged 13 and 14 were abducted by the Rapid Support Forces from a street in Khartoum. Their mother was physically assaulted, and the girls were released after a few hours.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

66. A total of 62 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access were verified during the reporting period. Of these, 13 occurred in 2022 and 49 occurred in 2023. In addition, the country task force received 1,002 reports of incidents of the denial of humanitarian access for which verification is ongoing.

67. Violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (48), the Rapid Support Forces (5), the Sudanese Armed Forces (2), the Sudanese Armed Forces Military Intelligence (2), SLA/AW (2), the Sudanese Police Force (1), SLA/MM (1) and SPLM-N al-Hilu (1).

68. Violations took place in South Darfur (22), West Darfur (11), Central Darfur (10), Khartoum (8), North Darfur (6), Al-Gazira (2), West Kordofan (1), East Darfur (1) and South Kordofan (1).

69. Humanitarian actors in the Sudan faced significant obstructions in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. As in the previous reporting period ([S/2022/627](#)), multilateral and international non-governmental organizations were the most affected by such violations. Incidents often involved multiple methods of denial of access, including the looting and/or destruction of humanitarian supplies (29), threats and/or violence against humanitarian personnel (29), carjacking (9), attacks on water points/infrastructure (8), movement restrictions (7) and bureaucratic impediments (2). As a result of the denial of, and challenges to, humanitarian access, nearly 1.7 million individuals – an estimated half of whom are children – were unable to receive essential humanitarian assistance during the reporting period.

70. For example, in April 2022, five international non-governmental organization staff were approached by a Sudanese Armed Forces commander, who requested that non-food items be given to him, which the staff refused to do. Shortly thereafter, Sudanese Armed Forces Military Intelligence officers arrived and detained the staff, took them to a Sudanese Armed Forces base and severely beat them, before releasing them in the evening of the same day, without explanation.

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

71. During the reporting period, the implementation of the 2021 road map, which entailed responsive and preventive elements to enhance the protection of conflict-affected children ([S/2022/627](#)), faced numerous challenges. Such challenges included delays in the establishment of state-level technical committees in many conflict-affected areas. The state-level technical committees were to lead the implementation of the road map in their respective states and thereby complement the efforts of the national high-level and technical committees. However, state-level technical committees were only established in three states. That situation created a vacuum of leadership on child protection efforts and negatively affected prevention and response efforts by state-level authorities, and further caused coordination challenges among stakeholders.

72. In June 2022, a national framework for the release and reintegration of children was developed, with those state-level technical committees that have been established, to support the implementation of the 2021 road map. The framework was subsequently endorsed by the national high-level committee on the implementation of the road map, comprised of relevant ministries, the Sudanese armed and security forces, armed groups and the National Council for Child Welfare. The framework was aimed at providing technical support to the technical committees in developing a national strategy for the protection of children in conflict.

73. Building on this engagement, the first joint verification mission by the country task force and signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement took place in early 2023. During that first mission and two subsequent joint verification missions, 10 locations that host the barracks of armed forces and of several armed groups were visited in North Darfur. Age assessment exercises during the three missions identified a total of 122 children affiliated with signatories of the Juba Peace Agreement, all of whom were released and handed over to child protection actors. Additional follow-up screening missions planned for the remainder of 2023 did not materialize owing to the outbreak of the current conflict.

74. In March 2023, the country task force visited a police training centre in South Kordofan and screened 277 armed group members, among whom 4 children were identified. Prior to the war erupting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, steps had been initiated to release and reintegrate these children. However, the conflict prevented the materialization of these steps. The country task force was also in the process of finalizing plans with the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces and SPLM-N Malik Agar to conduct similar screenings in five barracks in South Kordofan State starting in May 2023. That measure also had to be abandoned owing to the onset of the conflict in April 2023.

75. Initiatives aimed at preventing child recruitment and sexual violence, including by means of high-level advocacy, continued during the reporting period through social and behavioural change programmes focused on empowering women, boys and girls in prevention initiatives. For example, in October 2023, the country task force met with a Sudanese Armed Forces coordinator to discuss the release of children allegedly affiliated with the Rapid Support Forces and how to support their reintegration.

76. Recognizing the continued risk and prevalence of explosive ordnance, including for children, the United Nations expanded explosive ordnance risk education, contamination assessments and victim assistance throughout the reporting period, scaling up activities to reach new areas of the country. During the reporting period, the United Nations cleared more than 138 km² that had been previously contaminated or suspected to be contaminated.

77. The country task force provided essential protection services, including case management, family tracing and reunification of unaccompanied and separated children, services to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, and psychosocial support. After the outbreak of hostilities in April 2023 and despite tremendous challenges, community-based humanitarian mechanisms continued to provide children with access to some response services along established referral pathways and were supported by the country task force and partners in these efforts. Since the onset of the current conflict, parties to the conflict have imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement of conflict-affected populations, including children, thereby hindering their ability to seek safety and humanitarian assistance. The closure of facilities and the massive displacement of civilians, as well as the displacement of authorities and staff responsible for providing such services, further limited the availability and accessibility of essential services.

VI. Advocacy and engagement with parties to the conflict

78. Throughout the reporting period, the country task force sustained dialogue with listed parties through periodic meetings in collaboration with the National Council for Child Welfare at the national and state levels.

79. In February 2023, within the framework of the 2021 road map to protect children from violations in situations of armed conflict, a meeting of the national high-level committee was held in Khartoum to take stock of the implementation of the road map. Planning discussions were also held with state-level technical committees to conduct verification and screening exercises and separate children associated with parties to the conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States.

80. The country task force also continued to engage with the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces and with signatory and non-signatory parties to the Juba Peace Agreement, and supported the national technical committee in following up on the implementation of the 2021 road map. In early 2022, the country task force

was asked to support the implementation of the security arrangements stipulated in the Juba Peace Agreement. A workshop on the matter was conducted in March 2023 to review the progress made, identify main challenges and agree upon the way forward, including strategies to accelerate the screening, release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups.

81. Also in March 2023, in Kadugli, South Kordofan State, 70 personnel from the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Police Force, along with 15 members of state-level technical committees, were trained on the protection of children from the six grave violations in armed conflict and the role of the defence and security forces in the implementation of the 2021 road map.

82. After the outbreak of the war in April 2023, UNITAMS continued to engage with the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces focal points on specific verified violations against children perpetrated in Khartoum and the Darfur States. The country task force advocated that the parties ensure the safety and protection of children affected by armed conflict. The country task force will continue to seek opportunities to sustain this sensitive dialogue on how to better protect children from the consequences of war with the parties to the conflict.

VII. Observations and recommendations

83. I am appalled by the shocking increase in grave violations since the outbreak of the conflict, especially recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals. I urge all parties, particularly the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, to end and prevent grave violations and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

84. I call upon all parties to immediately commit to a durable cessation of hostilities.

85. I urge all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and better protect children during military operations, including by refraining from the use of explosive devices that cause death or injury to children and from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

86. I am deeply concerned by the increase in incidents of 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.

87. I urge all parties to refrain from targeting civilian infrastructure, in accordance with international humanitarian law, including schools and medical facilities and water and sanitation systems.

88. I further urge all parties to facilitate safe and unhindered humanitarian access so as to ensure the provision of life-saving assistance to civilians and to immediately vacate all schools and hospitals currently used for military purposes. I further reiterate my concern over ongoing access restrictions to conflict-affected areas, especially as those restrictions hinder the delivery of life-saving services to children.

89. I am gravely concerned about continued intercommunal violence, including through ethnically motivated attacks.

90. I call upon the Sudanese authorities to ensure accountability for grave violations against children by bringing perpetrators to justice and providing remedies to the victims. I highlight the importance of investigating all allegations of violations and

abuses against children. I further call upon the Sudanese authorities to strengthen the legal framework of the Sudan for the protection of children, including by recommencing national efforts to apply and strengthen the existing Child Act.

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

92. I note the efforts made by parties to the conflict, with the support of the United Nations, that led to the release of 122 children affiliated with those parties. I call upon all parties to build on these efforts and to adopt and effectively implement procedures on the screening and age assessment of recruits, and to immediately release all children from their ranks.

93. I urge all factions of SLA/AW to engage with the United Nations to sign an action plan, and call upon JEM, SLA/MM, SPLM-N-al-Hilu and SPLM-N Malik Agar to engage in the implementation of their respective action plans and other commitments, including obligations under their respective 2020 and 2021 road maps.

94. The current conflict in the Sudan, like the others that came before it, will have long-lasting and devastating impacts for children. I underline that achieving 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.

95. In view of the growing humanitarian needs throughout the Sudan, donor support remains paramount in ensuring that vast numbers of people in need receive life-saving assistance. I appeal to the international community to ensure that sufficient resources are available to the United Nations country team in order to continue to support the national authorities in the protection and reintegration of children affected by conflict, the monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations against children, and the monitoring and implementation of existing and future child protection commitments.
