

24. Children and armed conflict

During the period under review, the Security Council held one meeting in connection with the item entitled “Children and armed conflict”. The meeting was convened for the adoption of resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#) on the protection of education in armed conflict.⁸⁸⁰ More information on the meeting, including on participants, speakers and outcome, is provided in table 1 below. In addition, Council members held one high-level open videoconference.⁸⁸¹ More information on the open videoconference is provided in table 2 below.

The high-level open videoconference was held on 28 June 2021 at the initiative of Estonia, which held the Presidency for the month,⁸⁸² and further to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.⁸⁸³ The high-level videoconference was chaired by the President of Estonia and featured briefings from the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Advocate for Children Affected by War with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and an education specialist of Plan International Nigeria.⁸⁸⁴

In his remarks, the Secretary-General noted that conflict affected children particularly hard, with the start of 2021 being no exception.⁸⁸⁵ During 2020, almost 24,000 grave violations were committed against 19,300 children in the 21 conflict situations covered by the children and armed conflict mandate. The most prevalent violations continued to be the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, and the denial of humanitarian access. He expressed concern at emerging trends which showed an exponential increase in the number of children abducted and in sexual violence against boys and girls, as well as the disproportionate targeting of schools and

⁸⁸⁰ [S/PV.8889](#). For more information on the format of meetings, see part II, sect. II.

⁸⁸¹ [S/2021/617](#). For more information on the procedures and working methods developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, see part II.

⁸⁸² A concept note was circulated by a letter dated 8 June 2021 ([S/2021/541](#)).

⁸⁸³ See [S/2021/437](#).

⁸⁸⁴ See [S/2021/617](#). For further information on high-level meetings and videoconferences, see part II.

⁸⁸⁵ See [S/2021/617](#).

hospitals, especially those for the specific use of girls. The Secretary-General stated that, at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and conflict mandate, its continued relevance was sadly clear, and it remained a proven tool for protecting the world's children. He noted that, resulting from the work of his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations on the ground, 17 actions plans were being implemented and at least 35 new commitments were made by parties to conflict during 2020, while 12,300 children were released. The agenda was central to conflict resolution and prevention and, as armed conflicts evolved and as children faced multiple threats, the framework for the protection of children also had to adapt. The Secretary-General added that it was necessary to include child protection language in peace processes, enhance data analysis, early warning, and advocacy for early action and to elevate children's voices and best interests in peace processes and political decision-making. He called on the Council and all Member States to strongly support the protection of children in all ways and at all times.

In her statement, the Executive Director of UNICEF noted that the COVID-19 pandemic magnified the challenges in the daily life of children with school closures, increased risks of violence and abuse under lockdowns, the negative impact on mental health and negative coping mechanisms like child marriage and labour. The United Nations verified grave violations against over 19,000 children in humanitarian situations in 2020 including killings or maiming, recruitment and use in fighting, abduction and sexual exploitation and abuse. The Executive Director highlighted the urgent need for support by Member States, partners and the Council to first, give the protection of children the priority it deserved in the Council's decisions and deliberations, second, ensure the agreement by Member States and parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, third, secure the commitment by Member States to invest in women and girls and prevent gender-based violence in conflict, and fourth, increase child protection capacity across the board.

The Advocate for Children Affected by War with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict observed that lasting peace was at stake when children were subjected to the six grave violations against children in armed conflict detailed in the report of the Secretary-General. He noted that these violations also had invisible impacts that lasted much longer, including losing months or years of education,

social stigma, and trauma. He offered concrete examples of the effects of these violations on children and explained how different organizations were working to rekindle the link between children affected by conflict and their community, providing them skills, opportunities, and trauma healing. The Education Specialist of Plan International Nigeria, a civil society organization focusing on gender-responsive child protection and education in crises, spoke about the specific impact of grave violations against children in armed conflict, particularly on girls in the Lake Chad basin. He called on the Council to recognize and take immediate steps to (i) address the specific targeting of girls in armed conflict, (ii) address the use of girls as a weapon of war, (iii) demand and pursue accountability, (iv) help make the safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to children a reality, and (v) uphold its commitment to mainstream child protection in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations with the aim of sustaining peace and preventing conflict.

In their statements, Council members and other delegations noted that, at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the introduction of the children and armed conflict agenda before the Council, much more was necessary to address violations against children. Addressing the Council after the briefers, the Presidents of Estonia and Niger underscored the importance of the protection of schools and education as an essential element of conflict prevention. Similarly, noting that one in every three children living in countries affected by conflict or disaster was out of school, the President of Ireland stated that schools should be a protected, safe shelter and space for learning and development.

In terms of trends in 2020, Council members and other delegations paid particular attention to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in conflict situations. Multiple delegations stated that the pandemic had exacerbated the vulnerabilities of children to violations.⁸⁸⁶ In this regard, they highlighted the resulting lack of access to health and social services, increasing socioeconomic challenges, school closures and overall restrictions on the right to education. Among possible repercussions, some delegations noted that school closures

⁸⁸⁶ Ireland, Norway, United Kingdom, Mexico, Russian Federation, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Bahrain, Brazil, Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Fiji, Georgia, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine and United Arab Emirates.

increased the potential for child labour,⁸⁸⁷ and recruitment by armed groups.⁸⁸⁸ Many delegations added that school closures had a particular impact on girls who, among other violations, suffered sexual and gender-based violence and early and forced marriage.⁸⁸⁹ They also highlighted the disruption to the education of girls caused by the closing of schools as well as the obstacles preventing its resumption after reopening.⁸⁹⁰ Speakers called for gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that took the interests of children into account.⁸⁹¹ Furthermore, many statements noted the need to include and strengthen child protection in the mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions.⁸⁹² Delegations widely called for accountability against the perpetrators of violations, with some of them also highlighting the importance of independence, objectivity and transparency in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on violations against children.⁸⁹³

On 29 October 2021, the Council held a meeting at which it unanimously adopted resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#).⁸⁹⁴ By the resolution, the Council called on parties to conflict to safeguard, protect, respect, and promote the right to education and reaffirmed its contribution to the achievement of peace and security.⁸⁹⁵ The Council also urged Member States to develop effective measures to prevent and address attacks and threats of attacks against schools and education facilities.⁸⁹⁶ While condemning the military use of schools in contravention of international law, and recognizing that use by armed forces and armed groups could render schools legitimate targets of attack, thus endangering children's and teachers' safety, the Council

⁸⁸⁷ Niger, France, Bulgaria and European Union.

⁸⁸⁸ Niger, Norway, India, France, Tunisia, Armenia, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada (also on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict), European Union, Guatemala, Lebanon, Malta, Poland, Qatar, San Marino and South Africa.

⁸⁸⁹ United States, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, France, Tunisia, Algeria, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Myanmar and Qatar.

⁸⁹⁰ Niger, United States, France, Mexico, Italy and Malta.

⁸⁹¹ Niger, Kenya, Afghanistan, Argentina, Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, El Salvador, Germany, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Nepal, Poland, Portugal, San Marino, Somalia and United Arab Emirates.

⁸⁹² Ireland, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, India, Viet Nam, Mexico, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada (also on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict), Chile, European Union, Fiji, Germany, Guatemala, Malta, Poland, Republic of Korea, Somalia and Turkey.

⁸⁹³ Norway, India, United Kingdom, United Kingdom, Austria, Belgium, Canada (also on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict), Chile, Dominican Republic, European Union, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia.

⁸⁹⁴ See [S/PV.8889](#).

⁸⁹⁵ Resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#), para. 3.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

urged all parties to armed conflict to respect the civilian character of schools and educational facilities in accordance with international humanitarian law, encouraged Member States to take concrete measures to mitigate and avoid the use of schools by armed forces and to facilitate the continuation of education in situations of armed conflict, and called upon United Nations country-level task forces to enhance the monitoring and reporting on the military use of schools.⁸⁹⁷ Noting that girls could be the intended victims of attack on education, the Council urged Member States to take steps to address the equal enjoyment by girls to their right to education.⁸⁹⁸ The Council emphasized the need for Member States to facilitate the continuation of education during armed conflict, including, when feasible, through distance learning and digital technology.⁸⁹⁹ Acknowledging the adverse short, medium and long term negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the present and future of access to education in armed conflict for all children, it requested that measures, such as access to quality, safe, efficacious and affordable diagnostics, therapeutics, medicines and vaccines, and essential health technologies, and their components, as well as equipment for the COVID-19 response, were duly accounted for in facilitating access to education in armed conflict.⁹⁰⁰ Further to the vote, the representatives of Norway and Niger, as co-penholders, emphasized that the resolution was the first one uniquely dedicated to the protection of education in armed conflict.⁹⁰¹ The representative of Niger added that it was aimed at making a substantial contribution to the international normative framework, with appropriate, contextual and sustained responses at its heart. He further added that the resolution established an unequivocal link between the protection of education and international peace and security, with a strong call for a remobilization for the protection of education and to facilitate the continuation of learning in conflict contexts. The representative of India said that his delegation understood and recognized the resolution to make reference only to facilitating the continuation and protection of education in situations of armed conflict. The resolution, he said, should not be interpreted as being applicable to non-armed conflict situations. Such a narrative, he added, would be detrimental to the working of other organs of the United Nations.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., para. 6.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., para. 10.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., para. 16.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., para. 26.

⁹⁰¹ See [S/PV.8889](#), Norway and Niger.

In 2021, the Council addressed the children and armed conflict agenda in several of its country- and region-specific decisions as well as in decisions relating to thematic items. Selected provisions of decisions in which the Council explicitly referenced actions or measures concerning the agenda during 2021 are listed in table 3. In 2021, the Council, inter alia, (i) condemned and demanded the cessation of violations and abuses against children, including attacks on schools and deprivation of access to education, and called for accountability and compliance with international instruments; (ii) called for the implementation of action plans and programmes on children and armed conflict, with new emphasis on preventing and responding to sexual violence against children; (iii) underscored the importance of taking into account child protection concerns in the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration processes and security sector reform; (iv) requested monitoring, analysis and reporting on violations and abuses against children; (v) mandated United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions with child protection tasks; and (vi) imposed or called for the imposition of measures against perpetrators of violations against children. In addition, in 2021 and further to the adoption of resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#), the Council included in its decisions provisions calling for the protection, respect and promotion of the right to education in armed conflict.

Table 1
Meetings: Children and armed conflict

<i>Meeting record and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
S/PV.8889 (29 October 2021)		Draft resolution submitted by 99 Member States ^a (S/2021/893)	88 Member States ^b		Three Council members (Norway, Niger, India)	Resolution 2601 (2021) 15-0-0

^a Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chad, Chile, Comoros, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, The Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Viet Nam and Zambia.

^b Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chad, Chile, Comoros, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Fiji, Finland, Gabon, The Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand,

Nigeria, North Macedonia, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, San Marino, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Ukraine, Uruguay and Zambia.

Table 2
Videokonferences: Children and armed conflict

<i>Videokonference date</i>	<i>Videokonference record</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining) and record of written procedure</i>
28 June 2021	S/2021/617	Letter dated 30 June 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2021/617)	

Table 3
Selection of provisions relevant to children and armed conflict, by theme and agenda item

	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Paragraph</i>
	Condemnation of, and demands for cessation of, violations and abuses against children and calls for accountability and compliance with international instruments		
Country and region-specific	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution 2605 (2021)	25, 26, 54
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution 2612 (2021)	6, 11, 12, 13, 19, 54
	The situation in the Great Lakes region	S/PRST/2021/19	Seventh and twelfth paragraphs
	The situation in Libya	S/PRST/2021/12	Fourteenth paragraph
		S/PRST/2021/24	Twelfth paragraph
	The situation in Mali	Resolution 2584 (2021)	7, 15, 52, 53, 54
	The situation in Myanmar	S/PRST/2021/5	Second paragraph
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution 2568 (2021)	17, 36,
		Resolution 2592 (2021)	11(a), (b), 14(c)
		Resolution 2608 (2021)	20
Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution 2567 (2021)	10, 14	
	Resolution 2609 (2021)	28	
Peace consolidation in West Africa	S/PRST/2021/3	Fifth and twelfth paragraphs	
	S/PRST/2021/16	Fourth paragraph	
Thematic	Children and armed conflict	Resolution 2601 (2021)	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
	Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts	Resolution 2615 (2021)	3

Action plans and programmes on children and armed conflict

Country and region-specific	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution 2605 (2021)	26
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution 2612 (2021)	11, 29(ii)(k),
	The situation in Mali	Resolution 2584 (2021)	54
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution 2568 (2021)	36
		Resolution 2592 (2021)	11(b), (c)
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution 2567 (2021)	14, 18(j)
		Resolution 2579 (2021)	3(iii)(d)
Thematic	Children and armed conflict	Resolution 2601 (2021)	4, 5, 18,
Child protection in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform			
Country and region-specific	Peace and security in Africa	S/PRST/2021/10	Eleventh paragraph
	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution 2605 (2021)	11, 34(a)(v), 35(e)(i), 46
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution 2612 (2021)	19, 29(ii)(g), 29(ii)(i), 31,
	The situation in Iraq	Resolution 2576 (2021)	4(f)
	The situation in Mali	Resolution 2584 (2021)	30(a)(iii), 54
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution 2592 (2021)	11(a)(iii), 11(b)
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution 2579 (2021)	3(ii)(b)
Thematic	Children and armed conflict	Resolution 2601 (2021)	13
	Cooperation between United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security	S/PRST/2021/21	Eleventh paragraph
Monitoring, analysis and reporting on violations and abuses against children			
Country and region-specific	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution 2605 (2021)	35(a)(ii)
	The situation in Mali	Resolution 2584 (2021)	30 (d)(ii)
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution 2592 (2021)	6(i)
		Resolution 2607 (2021)	26
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution 2567 (2021)	3(d)(ii)
		Resolution 2577 (2021)	20
		Resolution 2579 (2021)	3(iii)(d)
Thematic	Children and armed conflict	Resolution 2601 (2021)	6(c), 19
		Resolution 2609 (2021)	29
Child protection mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions			

Country and region-specific	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution 2605 (2021)	34(a)(iv), 35(a)(ii), 35(e)(i), 42, 46,
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution 2612 (2021)	29(i)(c), 29(ii)(g), 29(ii)(i), 29(ii)(k), 31, 42,
	The situation in Iraq	Resolution 2576 (2021)	4(f)
	The situation in Mali	Resolution 2584 (2021)	30(a)(iii), 30(c)(ii), 30(d)(ii), 47
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution 2592 (2021)	6(i)
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution 2567 (2021)	3(a)(i), 3(a)(v), 18(j)
			Resolution 2579 (2021)
		Resolution 2609 (2021)	30(m)
Thematic	Children and armed conflict	Resolution 2601 (2021)	22
Measures against the perpetrators of violations and abuses against children			
Country and region-specific	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution 2612 (2021)	13
	The situation in the Middle East	Resolution 2564 (2021)	8
Calls for the protection, respect and promotion of the right to education in armed conflict			
Country and region-specific	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution 2605 (2021)	34(a)(v), 46, 54
	Peace consolidation in West Africa	S/PRST/2021/3	Ninth and twelfth paragraphs
		S/PRST/2021/16	Fourth and twelfth paragraphs
Thematic	Children and armed conflict	Resolution 2601 (2021)	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 24, 27

^a For additional information on mandates and decisions relevant to peacekeeping and political missions, see part X.