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Promotion and protection of the rights of children: promotion and protection of the rights of children

Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Summary

The present report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children is submitted to the General Assembly in accordance with resolution 64/146. Najat Maalla M'jid assumed the position of Special Representative on 1 July 2019. In this her first report to the Assembly as Special Representative, she notes the momentum created by the review, at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019, of the targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to end violence against children (especially target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals), and the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The report highlights action taken at national and regional levels towards realizing the right of every child to protection from violence. The Special Representative will continue to use the opportunity presented by the 2030 Agenda to further accelerate progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children. A core element of the advocacy undertaken by the mandate will be to act as a bridge-builder and catalyst for change by establishing and strengthening partnerships among those working to end violence against children, and to emphasize the role of children and young people as key agents of change.

* A/74/150.



I. Introduction

1. The present report reviews developments promoted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children at the global, regional and national levels and provides an overview of the results achieved.
2. Guided by General Assembly resolution [62/141](#), by which the Assembly established the mandate, the Special Representative is a global, independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children.
3. At its seventy-third session, the General Assembly reaffirmed its support for the work of the Special Representative and recommended that the Secretary-General extend the mandate for a further three years and maintain support for its effective and independent performance and sustainability (resolution [73/155](#), paras. 55–56).
4. In renewing the mandate, the General Assembly recognized the progress achieved in promoting the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children in all regions, and in advancing the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children, including through partnerships with regional organizations, as well as through advocacy, field missions, expert consultations and thematic reports addressing emerging concerns.
5. On 1 July 2019, Najat Maalla M’jid assumed the position of Special Representative. In this her first report as Special Representative to the General Assembly, and in view of the limited time that has elapsed since her appointment, she sets out the approach and working methods she intends to follow in implementing her mandate.
6. In November 2019 the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be celebrated. Realizing every child’s right to freedom from violence is a fundamental dimension of the Convention: it explicitly prohibits torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; bans the use of the death penalty and life imprisonment for children; makes imperative the protection of children from harmful practices, as well as from sexual exploitation and abuse, from sale, trafficking and any other form of exploitation; prohibits school violence and any form of school discipline contrary to the child’s human dignity; and safeguards children from the hidden manifestations of violence within the home or institutions for the protection of children.
7. The inclusion of a specific target to end all forms of violence against children in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals), gives renewed impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation. Several other Sustainable Development Goal targets promote an environment of safety and non-violence for children, address specific forms of violence in childhood such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, and the eradication of child labour, including the recruitment and exploitation of children as soldiers.
8. The Special Representative will continue to use the opportunity presented by the 2030 Agenda to accelerate progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children.
9. In 2019, the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children will mark its first 10 years. The passing of this milestone, together with the review of the first phase of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention, is an appropriate moment to take stock of progress towards ending violence against children, identify shortfalls and highlight what more needs to be done to accelerate progress.

II. Keeping the promise to end violence against children by 2030

10. In July 2019, the high-level political forum on sustainable development reviewed four of the Sustainable Development Goals that are of special relevance to ending violence against children: Goal 4 on inclusive, safe and equitable quality education; Goal 8 on decent employment, including the elimination of child labour; Goal 10 on reducing inequalities; and Goal 16 on building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, including its specific target 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children.

11. In the period leading up to the high-level political forum, the Special Representative actively engaged in the review processes to help to ensure that distinct attention was given to the violence-related targets of the Goals and their role in achieving the vision of the 2030 Agenda. To support this advocacy campaign, in cooperation with a wide range of partners, the Special Representative developed a thematic report entitled *Keeping the Promise: Ending violence against Children by 2030*,¹ that was launched at a high-level event at the high-level political forum.

12. The launch event was attended by Ministers from Member States presenting voluntary national reviews, the senior leadership of the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and representatives of civil society. The event was opened with powerful interventions by four children who are actively engaged in action towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

13. *Keeping the Promise* builds on national implementation efforts, as well as initiatives promoted by a wide range of stakeholders to mobilize support and influence progress, including United Nations entities, regional organizations, civil society, professional associations, academia, religious leaders and independent children's rights institutions. It takes stock of progress made during the first four years of the 2030 Agenda, documenting lessons learned, acknowledging challenges and anticipating strategic actions needed to realize its vision of a world free from fear and from violence. *Keeping the Promise* also captures the views, experiences and recommendations of young people who are crucial agents of change.

A. Progress and challenges since 2015 in ending violence against children

14. In his foreword to *Keeping the Promise*, the Secretary-General declares that “violence against children is a silent emergency that must end. And zero tolerance for violence against children is a priority that I am committed to pursue. It is high time to change the continuum of violence that shapes children's lives to a continuum of protection of their human rights”.

15. The solemn commitment to safeguard the right of every child to protection from all forms of violence by the 196 States that have ratified the Convention and the 2030 Agenda vision of a world free from violence constitute a promise to bring this silent emergency to an end. *Keeping the Promise* documents the momentum that has been created towards reaching this goal. The impetus is fuelled by shifting attitudes, with a widely shared consensus that violence against children is intolerable, and growing confidence based on evidence that it is not inevitable and can be prevented. It is seen in new laws and policies, new initiatives, new evidence and new partnership – with children themselves increasingly taking the lead.

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.I.13.

16. However, from the process of 2030 Agenda reviews, including the high-level political forum and the voluntary national reviews, we see slow progress and a need for a greater sense of urgency.

17. In her keynote address at the opening of the high-level political forum, the Special Representative reminded participants that every year at least 1 billion children – which is half of the world’s children – experience violence. Three in every four children under the age of 5 experience violent discipline at the hands of caregivers. In schools, one in every two children is subjected to peer-to-peer violence. Children now account for 30 per cent of those who are trafficked, the sexual exploitation of victims being the main driver of human trafficking. Children with disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence than other children, while children from other disadvantaged groups also face disproportionately high levels of violence.

18. Furthermore, there are disturbing trends and emerging challenges that threaten the gains that have been made for children, including climate change, long-term conflicts and more severe humanitarian disasters, increasing numbers of children on the move, bullying and cyberbullying, and the spread of terrorism and violent extremism groups.

19. Violence often starts in early childhood: as children grow it becomes a continuum, their lives threatened by fear, pain and insecurity that undermines their health, education and development.

20. Violence breeds violence, and children experience it in many forms across many contexts, often carrying their experiences into adulthood where violence may be passed down as a grim legacy to their own children. The physical, emotional, psychological and economic cost for victims, families and entire societies is immense.

21. The wide range of contributions to *Keeping the Promise* from across regions, organizations and institutions came to markedly similar conclusions on what was needed to accelerate progress towards reaching the 2030 Agenda target to end violence against children. They fell into five key domains: strengthening legal and policy frameworks; reinforcing the protective shield around children; the need for more data and research on the nature and prevalence of violence against children; strengthening the global movement on the issue by widening partnership; and, most crucially, amplifying the voice of children.

B. Strengthening legal and policy frameworks

22. At the national level, almost 100 countries now have comprehensive policies in place to prevent and respond to violence against children, and around 60 have comprehensive legislation to ban violence against children in all its forms, including at home and in schools.² There has also been progress on ending female genital mutilation and child marriage, as a growing number of countries have adopted legal and policy frameworks to outlaw these harmful practices.

23. The high-level political forum provides a strategic platform to advance progress in children’s protection from violence and this topic has increasingly gained attention. In 2019, 47 States presented voluntary national reviews and many used this opportunity to pay special attention in their reports to the protection of children.

24. The voluntary national reviews documented a wide range of measures taken towards achieving target 16.2 and the other targets of the Sustainable Development

² See UNICEF, “Violent discipline”, November 2017. Available at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/violent-discipline/>.

Goals related to violence against children, including the adoption of national plans and policies; enactment or reform of legislation; strengthening institutions and partnerships; training of professionals; and consolidation of data and research.

25. For example, in Azerbaijan the Government is developing proposals for law reform on the prevention of child marriage in consultation with a broad range of national stakeholders. In 2015, all local authorities established cross-sectoral monitoring groups on violence against children.

26. Algeria adopted a Child Protection Law in 2015, which requires the State to implement all appropriate measures to guarantee the protection of children from all forms of violence. The Law provides for the establishment of the National Institute for the Protection and Promotion of Children tasked with ensuring coordination between all relevant child protection actors.

27. Burkina Faso reported on its efforts to prevent and address harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, including through awareness-raising at the community level; capacity-building for professionals working in fields of law enforcement, education and health; and supporting public declarations on the abandonment of such practices.

28. In Cambodia in 2017 the Government launched its Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children 2017–2021 and has established an intersectoral committee led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation to lead on coordination for implementation of the plan.

29. Cameroon noted awareness-raising and advocacy measures taken to tackle child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence, including in humanitarian settings.

30. The Central African Republic has created a dedicated structure to enhance prevention measures and to combat impunity for sexual violence against women and children.

31. Chad adopted legislation prohibiting child marriage in 2015 and a national strategy on combating gender-based violence in 2018. Its efforts to tackle this harmful practice have included a strong engagement with religious and community leaders.

32. Chile reported that violence prevention is integrated into the national policy on children and adolescents for 2015–2025 and its accompanying Action Plan, which has led to law reform processes and policies, including the creation of an ombudsperson on children's rights; the establishment of video recording for interviewing victims of sexual violence and a multisectoral mechanism on violence prevention and eradication. Chile is also implementing an early alert programme (*alerta temprana*) which aims at identifying children at risk to prevent violations of their rights.

33. Croatia reported on its National Strategy for Children's Rights 2014–2020, which is the main strategic document towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children and the implementation of activities for its prevention.

34. Ghana highlighted its medium-term national development policy framework for 2018–2021, which gives space for youth participation in national socioeconomic development and political governance, including civic education, governance and democracy in school curricula; introducing programmes to break the cycle of violence and crime; and promoting awareness of the rights and responsibilities of youth.

35. Iceland noted the formation of a special interministerial group on children appointed by the newly-formed Ministry of Social Affairs and Children. This group in collaboration with the parliamentary committee on children's affairs and the

Association of Icelandic Local Authorities will undertake a review of the Child Protection Act.

36. In Indonesia, the Government has amended the Marriage Law on the minimum age of marriage and has developed a national strategy for the prevention of child marriage in 2019; the Constitutional Court has removed marriage age discrimination by raising the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 19, equivalent to that for boys. Indonesia also reported on its National Strategy for the Elimination of Violence against Children (2016–2020), which provides cross-sectoral guidance.

37. In Iraq, a national child protection policy is being developed to improve the situation of children, including children in conflict with the law, and to end violence and ill-treatment, child labour and violence in institutions.

38. Kazakhstan reported on its legal framework for the protection of children's rights and the establishment in 2016 of the office of Commissioner for the Rights of the Child to monitor implementation.

39. In Kuwait, the National Development Plan (2015–2020) is focused on developing health, social and cultural services for all children and establishing an early-warning mechanism to identify cases of violence. The Plan also encourages caregivers to use non-violent forms of discipline.

40. Lesotho reported on its mapping and assessment of the child protection system conducted in 2019, and its violence against children survey. The survey produced a set of high priority indicators that are used for decision-making and programming on child protection across the country.

41. Mauritania reported on steps taken to tackle harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, including through legislative reform, the development of national strategies and the promotion of public campaigns.

42. Mongolia has adopted a law on child rights and a law on child protection, and implementation has begun. A child and youth development agency has been established at the national and local level and funding for child protection issues has been significantly increased.

43. Sierra Leone reported on an online survey conducted among young people aged 15 to 19 to assess their views on implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In relation to violence, about 59 per cent felt safe in their home and community; among the remaining 41 per cent who did not feel safe, 60 per cent were afraid of violent attacks, 21 per cent of rape, and 8 per cent of pickpockets. The report also highlighted expanded efforts to provide access to justice through the Legal Aid Board: 215,000 vulnerable persons have benefited from legal representation, 19 per cent of whom were children.

44. South Africa noted its Integrated Programme of Action: addressing violence against women and children (2013–2018). Campaigns have also been undertaken to educate and raise awareness on violence against women and children, including 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence and 365 Days of Action to End Violence against Women and Children.

45. Tunisia reported on progress in tackling impunity for sexual offences against children by repealing legal provisions allowing those who commit sexual offences against children to avoid prosecution by marrying their victims.

46. Turkey highlighted its efforts to protect children and youth from violence and harmful habits by strengthening its work on the promotion of sports, culture, arts and volunteer activities. Turkey has increased the capacity of women's shelters to protect women victims of violence and their children. It has also created a helpline for

women, children and persons with disabilities that provides psychosocial, legal and economic counselling services to women and children victims of violence.

47. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland reported on efforts to combat child trafficking that include innovative projects testing ways to protect vulnerable children, as well as setting up independent child trafficking advocates across England and Wales as a source of advice for trafficked children. In 2017, the Government issued a progress report on tackling child sexual exploitation and began a £40 million package of measures to protect young people and tackle offenders. An independent inquiry into child sexual abuse has also been established to draw out systemic lessons.

48. The United Republic of Tanzania highlighted its five-year National Plan of Action to End Violence against Women and Children (2017–2022), which consolidates eight different action plans addressing violence against women and children. The plan addresses issues of norms and values, a safe environment, economic strengthening of households, implementation and enforcement of laws, response support services, safe schools and life skills with the purpose of ending violence against women and children and realizing their rights.

49. Vanuatu reported on its adoption of a child online protection national strategy (2014–2021) and the national child protection policy 2016–2026, which are aligned with the national sustainable development plan.

50. The increasing number of States that reported in their voluntary national reviews on steps taken to address violence against children is encouraging, as the selection of initiatives highlighted above illustrates. At the same time, it is important to note that there was a broad consensus among the many contributors to *Keeping the Promise* that while law and policy reform are essential measures Governments must take to strengthen the protection of children, they are only as good as their enforcement and implementation. The gap between political will to end violence against children and adequate resourcing urgently needs to be closed.

C. Reinforcing the protective shield around children

51. Violence against children demands sustained and coordinated action across every sector, from child protection to justice for children, and from education and health to social protection. Growing evidence on what works for children and families is informing a shift towards more comprehensive and multisectoral initiatives to strengthen entire systems so that they can more effectively prevent and respond to violence against children.

52. A systems approach recognizes both the interconnectedness of children's rights and the complex, multi-dimensional causes and consequences of violence. Effective initiatives include approaches where multisectoral teams provide tailored support to children and families.

53. Child protection services play a critical role in supporting children affected by violence and in violence prevention but they must be adequately resourced and supported as a priority in the policy agenda. Child-sensitive counselling, reporting and referral services that are accessible to all children are also needed.

54. Child-friendly justice systems are essential to prevent and respond to violence, to protect child victims and witnesses, to end impunity and to hold offenders to account. Models such as the Barnahus and other one-stop centres that provide multidisciplinary and inter-agency support to children who are victims or witnesses of violence, with criminal investigations taking place in parallel with child protection interventions, have been shown to be highly effective.

55. Measures to uphold justice are particularly important for children held in detention, who are vulnerable to violent and degrading treatment throughout the criminal justice process. It is vital to prevent deprivation of liberty and to provide non-custodial alternatives for children's care, support and reintegration.

56. Schools are often places where children endure violence on the way to and from the classroom, from their peers or at the hands of their teachers, and they may be victims of attacks against their own schools. Sustained progress towards reaching Sustainable Development Goal 4, on a quality and inclusive education for all with schools that are safe and supportive, is crucial to addressing violence against children.

57. Health services play a key role in preventing and responding to violence against children. The World Health Organization (WHO) has provided guidance to States on how to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multisectoral response to address interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children.³

58. While children from all socioeconomic backgrounds are vulnerable to violence, poverty reduction measures and strengthened social protection systems provide a bulwark against the stresses that can be an additional risk factor for violence.

59. Raising awareness of violence against children and its serious impact on children's development and well-being is essential to create demand for its end. Efforts to strengthen systems are enhanced through initiatives such as the #ENDviolence campaign by UNICEF, which has stimulated debate and action in more than 100 countries to date. WHO has led a wide range of international agencies in developing the evidence-based package INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children to help countries and communities to achieve target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴

60. The rights of children to protection from violence continue when they are on the move as refugees or migrants and it is essential that they have access to social services, including ensuring the appointment of a guardian, and ending the detention that heightens the risk of abuse and exploitation.

61. The principal challenge in strengthening the protective shield around children is the gap between the intentions of many policies and programmes that are in place and the resources both human and financial that are needed for effective implementation. Child protection systems remain weak in many countries, lacking enough skilled social workers to do the job.

D. Data, research and evidence

62. Solving a problem requires that it be fully understood. To put it simply, children who are not counted do not count in the policies and initiatives intended to support them. Monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals relating to children, including target 16.2, demands more and better data, and the growing body of evidence on violence against children needs to be more widely disseminated.

63. Major data initiatives on violence against children, such as the multiple indicator cluster surveys, demographic and health surveys and violence against children surveys have vastly increased our knowledge of the scale and nature of violence against children in recent years. To date, violence against children surveys

³ Available at <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/global-plan-of-action/en/>.

⁴ Available at www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire-package/en/.

have generated comprehensive and reliable data for more than 10 per cent of the world's population under the age of 25.

64. The more that is learned about the scale of violence against children the more daunting it may seem. However, greater knowledge of the damage caused by violence reinforces a core argument: no level of violence in a child's life is harmless.

65. There is also a growing evidence base on issues that were once poorly understood, including bullying and school violence, child marriage, and online sexual exploitation of children.

66. The need to narrow the data gaps that hamper efforts to end violence against children becomes greater as the willingness to try to address it grows. The gaps include a lack of information about violence against children on the move, the sexual exploitation of boys, and beliefs linked to witchcraft and other superstitions that endanger the lives of children.

67. There is a good investment case for gathering more evidence by showing its effective use to end violence against children, and this must be expressed more powerfully to policy makers.

E. Strengthening the global movement to end violence against children by widening partnership

68. No individual, community, organization or sector working alone can end violence against children. As recognized in Goal 17, partnership is crucial in delivering the 2030 Agenda. The past years have been marked by a growing global movement on violence against children, mobilizing the United Nations system, civil society organizations, the private sector, faith-based organizations and more.

69. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda gave new impetus to this process. Many partners at the global and regional levels have come together to strengthen protection of children from violence, as seen, for example, in the work of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children; Alliance 8.7; the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies; the Task Force on Justice; and the Global Youth Partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals.

70. Civil society organizations play a crucial role worldwide in shaping policies and opinions. Many have joined the Civil Society Forum to End Violence against Children, which ensures a strong and coherent voice for civil society organizations on this issue at the global level.

71. The potential of the private sector to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals is shown by the Children's Rights and Business Principles developed by the Global Compact, Save the Children and UNICEF. It guides companies on respect and support for child rights, including the requirement to report concerns about exploitation or abuse. Another example is the involvement of the World Tourism Organization, the World Travel and Tourism Council, and the travel and tourism industry in preventing and protecting children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism.

72. Most of the world's population – around 5 billion people – belong to religious communities and thus faith-based organizations are in a unique position to champion children's rights, asserting their moral authority to make a difference, while also providing support and services to children affected by violence, exploitation and abuse. Religious communities and faith-based organizations have come together at a number of landmark events in recent years and have developed important studies and tools for religious communities that are related to child protection. For example, to

mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention, Arigatou International, in collaboration with the office of the Special Representative, UNICEF and other key partners, has developed a study of perspectives on the Convention across the world's major religions with experts on child rights, religious leaders and scholars.

73. Violence against children is everybody's business. The existing global movement must be further expanded and action accelerated so that every Government, individual, organization, company and religious community can play its role in bringing violence against children to an end.

F. Amplifying the voice of children

74. The participation of children matters profoundly: efforts to tackle violence against them are more likely to succeed when informed by their views. Their role in the debate on violence has evolved over the years, from observing initiatives at the sidelines to setting their own agenda.

75. The most compelling reason to end violence against children is their urgent cry for it to stop. A review of consultations with children in the lead-up to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, conducted by the office of the Special Representative, Plan International and Save the Children, found violence led the list of concerns for the thousands of children who took part. It was also top of the list for 170,000 refugee and migrant children surveyed online by the Special Representative and UNICEF, and for more than 100,000 young people worldwide polled on bullying.

76. The sense of urgency to tackle global issues means that children no longer wait for adults to invite them to participate. They increasingly set their own agenda. Children and adolescents who speak out have attracted massive support, but they have also faced suspicion and hostility. It is essential that children have opportunities to mobilize and speak out safely while their rights are safeguarded. Children will no longer remain silent as their rights to protection from violence are violated with impunity. They increasingly express the demand to be involved in the decisions that affect them: as one of the children at the *Keeping the Promise* launch at the high-level political forum succinctly said about child participation, "there should be nothing about us, without us!".

77. The 2019 review processes on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda show that when ending violence against children is prioritized and people work together, progress is possible. The task ahead is to take what works to scale, backed by the necessary resources and a genuine commitment to prevent – not only to respond to – the violence inflicted on children worldwide.

III. Reinforcing regional processes in support of the implementation of Agenda 2030

78. Cooperation with regional organizations and institutions will continue to be a major thrust of the strategy of the Special Representative to accelerate progress in children's protection from violence.

79. The partnership of the mandate with regional bodies helps to place this concern at the centre of the regional policy agenda, while enhancing the accountability of States and supporting national implementation efforts. It has contributed to the development of regional plans of action, monitoring reports and periodic review meetings.

80. A new generation of regional plans on ending violence against children, aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is being developed. These plans help to strengthen national legislation and public policies, consolidate data and research, and promote awareness-raising campaigns.
81. A key element of the strategy of the mandate has been a high-level consultation held each year with regional organizations and institutions. The annual high-level round table is a unique, strategic mechanism within the United Nations system to enhance cross-regional and South-South cooperation on ending violence against children through policy dialogue, sharing knowledge and good practices, and identifying trends and pressing challenges.
82. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the cross-regional round table has also provided an opportunity for regional organizations to identify how they can best support national-level implementation of the 2030 Agenda and reach the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals related to ending violence against children.
83. The ninth cross-regional round table on violence against children was co-hosted by the office of the Special Representative and the African Child Policy Forum in February 2019 at the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa.
84. The special theme of the ninth cross-regional round table was the risk and reality of violence faced by children on the move. This built on the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration and the global compact on refugees, as well as the decision of the African Union to designate 2019 as the Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.
85. The call for action adopted at the round table welcomed the inclusion of the protection of children on the move on the agendas of regional organizations and encouraged further efforts to align national, regional and global responses with international human rights standards.
86. The call for action also highlighted the opportunities arising in 2019 to encourage and support Member States in fulfilling the promise of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to end violence against children through implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It stressed the role regional bodies could play in supporting States to highlight the issue of ending violence against children in their engagement with the 2019 review processes, including the preparation of voluntary national reviews, participation in the 2030 Agenda summit in September, as well through celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention in November.
87. The *African Report on Child Wellbeing 2018* published by the African Child Policy Forum found that, while several countries in the continent have legislation, policies and institutions on children's rights, many laws and practices are inconsistent with international standards. The high incidence of child labour, child marriage and violence against children shows the gap between rhetoric and action and the lack of enforcement of legislation.
88. Both the African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, and Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 are aligned with the 2030 Agenda, including target 16.2.
89. Fourteen countries in Africa have undertaken comprehensive household surveys to document the magnitude, nature and impact of violence in childhood. Information from violence against children surveys has supported multi-sectoral government policy, planning, programming and budgeting, as well as the enactment of legislation to prevent violence and protect child victims.
90. The Special Representative continued to collaborate with the secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children in implementation

of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children, of 2015. Aligned with the 2030 Agenda, the Plan of Action promotes national action in ASEAN member States towards the violence-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

91. The Special Representative urged representatives of the ASEAN Commission to seize the opportunity provided by the 2019 high-level political forum to accelerate action towards children's protection from violence, and encouraged ASEAN to undertake a mid-term review of the Regional Plan of Action, building upon the significant baseline study conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with ASEAN member States.

92. The mid-term review of the Regional Plan of Action was published in July 2019 and highlights the commitment of ASEAN member States to address violence against children. It documents progress made by member States in the priority areas of the plan, including the introduction of legislation to strengthen the protection of children, increasing the use of alternative measures to judicial proceedings and detention, the use of family-based alternatives to the institutionalization of children in need of care, and promoting non-violent approaches to parenting.

93. The mid-term review also identified areas where further efforts by ASEAN member States are needed, including more data collection and research to better understand the scale and nature of violence against children, especially sexual violence; strengthening national interministerial coordination mechanisms for the implementation of laws and national plans on violence against children; and increasing the budgetary allocations for child protection services and the capacity of the national social service workforce.

94. Ending violence against children remains a priority for the Council of Europe under its Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016–2021). The Strategy explicitly aims to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; as part of this work, the Council's ad hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child is mandated to advise on priority actions to support the implementation of standards on the protection of children from violence, including target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has also actively supported implementation of the Goals, especially through the recent adoption of a resolution and recommendation on the Council's contribution to ending violence against children in the framework of the Goals.

95. Through its group of experts on responses to violence against children, the Council's ad hoc Committee has led a survey among Council of Europe member States on responses to violence against children at the national level. According to the findings of the survey, member States should step up the development and implementation of integrated national strategies on violence against children, along with stronger action on independent monitoring, training for professionals, mandatory reporting, and child participation. The group of experts has also begun the development of an online exchange platform on responses to violence against children that will provide access to international, European and national instruments and good practice when it is launched late in 2019.

96. The Council of Europe continues to play a leading role in promoting children's protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee) recently adopted an opinion on child sexually suggestive or explicit images and/or videos generated, shared and received by children, and is also evaluating action by parties to that Convention on the protection of children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and abuse.

97. The Council of Europe has continued to promote its “Start to talk” campaign on ending child sexual abuse in sport. Organizations in 18 countries have so far joined the initiative, which is also supported by the International Federation of Association Football, the International Olympic Committee and the Union of European Football Associations.

98. December 2018 marked the twentieth anniversary of the work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States on promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child undertaken by its Expert Group on Children at Risk and national stakeholders.

99. That Expert Group has played a leading role in sharing and promoting good practices aimed at ending violence against children across the Baltic Sea region. Since 2015 the Expert Group has led the PROMISE project, whose purpose is to support the establishment of child-friendly, multidisciplinary and integrated services for child victims and witnesses of violence along the Barnahus model. Over the past four years, the number of countries in Europe operating such services has risen from just a handful to more than 20.

100. The Expert Group has also been a key player in supporting the implementation of the prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings: 10 of the 11 States members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States have so far achieved full legal prohibition. In November 2018, the Expert Group organized a high-level conference at which six guidance reports, a comic book and a campaign were launched with the aim of supporting action within the Baltic Sea region and around the world to end corporal punishment.

101. The Expert Group has equally been to the fore in promoting child participation and has developed tools to strengthen child-sensitive mechanisms that allow children’s voices to be heard, including those of survivors of human trafficking and commercial exploitation.

102. In October 2018, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) renewed its commitment to safeguarding children’s rights, including their protection from violence as a cross-cutting dimension of its work towards realizing the vision of the 2030 Agenda. Under the pro tempore presidency of Uruguay, the MERCOSUR Permanent Commission Niñ@Sur reaffirmed the commitment of countries in South America to end violence against children in line with the Convention and the 2030 Agenda. Decisions adopted by Niñ@Sur included endorsement of the Montevideo Declaration (see below); integration of violence prevention and response mechanisms as a cross-cutting issue in its 2019–2020 Action Plan; approval of a regional guide to protect children on the move; and the creation of the Southern Network of Children and Adolescents.

103. Uruguay also hosted the second Inter-American Forum on National Child Protection Systems, held on 22 and 23 October 2018, which concluded with the adoption of the Montevideo Declaration, in which children’s protection from all forms of violence is recognized as a programmatic principle of national child protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. It also calls for the integration of the 2030 Agenda and its targets and indicators in the process of strengthening child protection systems in the region.

104. Recognizing the humanitarian crisis faced by migration flows in Latin America, the Montevideo Declaration includes a strong call to ensure the best interests of the child and the safeguarding of the rights of children on the move in the region. Attention was given to the migration flows from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) to other countries in South America. The Declaration calls for the urgent need to address the driving causes of migration; the obligation to keep families together;

ensuring special protection of children, including by not placing children in detention; and ensuring the effective response of national child protection systems. In line with the Global Compact for Migration, these actions need to be supported by bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation. In this regard, the office of the Special Representative participated in meetings with civil society organizations, Governments and international organizations working for children on the move in South America and since then has continued dialogue with key allies in the region to support the safeguarding of the rights of children on the move in the Americas.

105. A regional meeting with civil society to inform the global study on children deprived of their liberty was hosted by Uruguay. The office of the Special Representative presented the preliminary findings of its forthcoming report entitled “Children in Latin America speak about the impact of deprivation of liberty”, which captures both qualitative and quantitative data on children affected by deprivation of liberty in justice institutions in Paraguay and Uruguay, and children of incarcerated parents in Latin America. One key finding is the link between violence and deprivation of liberty and the negative and long-lasting impact that deprivation of liberty has on children’s lives. Children affected by deprivation of liberty call for strong political commitment and investment to prevent both deprivation of liberty and violence against children.

106. In November 2018, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and UNICEF convened the first regional dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean “On the road to equality”: 30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Santiago. The meeting brought together high-level authorities of Latin America and Caribbean countries, high-level United Nations representatives, civil society organizations and over 140 children and young people from the Americas.

107. The regional dialogue concluded with a declaration of the adolescents of the Americas in which they stressed their belief in the transformative change made by the Convention; they also highlighted the interlinkages between poverty inequality and violence. Adolescents identified education as one of the most transformative tools to prevent and to end violence. They called for a reform of the education system in the Americas to create an education system that has the capacities to empower them and to enable them to develop the skills to face the challenges of today’s world.

108. In 2019, the office of the Special Representative in collaboration with Save the Children issued a child-friendly version of general comments No. 22 and No. 23 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to advance the protection of the rights of children on the move in the Americas.⁵

109. Children’s protection from violence in South Asia was strengthened by the implementation of a regional plan of action (2016–2021) for the prevention and elimination of child labour, spearheaded by the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children, an apex body of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Child labour is a high priority for many countries in the region; for example, the Government of Nepal adopted a 2018–2028 National Master Plan on Child Labour and became a pathfinder country of Alliance 8.7.

110. In 2018, the regional action plan on child marriage for 2015–2018 was extended for another five years and its implementation pursued through national-level efforts, most recently in Bangladesh, where a national plan of action for 2018–2030 was launched in August 2018. This was supported by important data collection efforts on

⁵ “Mis derechos viajan conmigo”. Available at https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/children_declarations/child_participation/finalmis_derechos_viajan_conmigo_final.pdf.

the socio-normative dimensions of child marriage to strengthen advocacy and response.

111. Furthermore, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children led the development of a regional strategy and action plan to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, including online. The implementation of the strategy is supported by national coalitions and an expert advisory group.

IV. Moving forward

112. *Keeping the Promise* highlights progress towards ending violence against children as well as its continuing toll. There is a growing realization that violence against children threatens the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals, from poverty reduction to a quality education for all, and from ending hunger and social exclusion to the creation of peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

113. There is also a deeper understanding of how damaged childhoods translate into damaged families, communities, societies and nations. While there is some debate on the exact scale of the financial cost of violence against children to national economies, it is clear that it is immense – the most widely quoted estimate is that it may be up to \$7 trillion/year.⁶ Furthermore, the price of preventing violence against children is small when set alongside the vast sums currently being lost in wasted human and social capital.

114. Violence against children is not a single issue with a single solution. It is a multi-pronged threat that demands joined-up action. This requires a dynamic process that starts with strong laws and policies, backed by effective and progressive implementation, comprehensive approaches and robust monitoring and evaluation. It must be collective – driven by partnership across regions, sectors and systems – and must be informed by the voices of children.

115. The scale of the challenges ahead is large. Programmes and policies still need to gain greater traction. Effective initiatives need expansion to reach all children at risk, especially those left furthest behind. We need stronger partnerships, especially with children – because what works, works better when they are part of the solution.

116. This calls for adequate financing and investment in children, prioritizing those in situations of greatest vulnerability and marginalization; participation throughout the implementation and follow-up and review processes, with effective measures to bring about accountability; and a human rights approach to data and monitoring, including through transparency and quality disaggregated data to reflect the situation of all children, particularly those who are too often uncounted yet also at greatest risk of being left behind.

V. Conclusion

117. As the international community looks ahead to the next phase of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Special Representative will develop a practical road map for the work of the mandate in consultation with key stakeholders, including Member States, United Nations agencies and human rights mechanisms, regional organizations, civil society, faith-based organizations, national human rights institutions, the private sector, media, and child and youth organizations.

⁶ Paola Perezniето and others, *The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence against Children*, London, Overseas Development Institute, 2014.

118. The road map will identify priority issues for the Special Representative's advocacy, follow-up and monitoring, as well as opportunities for joint action and for sharing knowledge and providing guidance and support that will help to bring an end to violence against children by 2030.

119. One of the principles underpinning the work of the Special Representative is that children must be at the heart of the mandate's work. The Special Representative will pursue a holistic and child-rights centred approach that emphasizes children's role as agents of change and their capacity for leadership in building a world free from violence. The Special Representative will pursue close collaboration with child-led and child-focused organizations to ensure that the mandate amplifies children's voices and takes their views fully into account.

120. The Special Representative will seek to ensure continuity in the implementation of the mandate and to build on the solid foundation laid by her predecessor; she will consolidate the achievements of the mandate and explore new ways to further develop it. The Special Representative will also act as a bridge-builder and catalyst for change by establishing and strengthening partnerships among those working to end violence against children.

121. Effective cooperation among the many actors in this field is critical. Children's lives are not divided thematically to correspond to the mandates of the organizations working on their behalf: children are often exposed to more than one form of violence and in more than one setting. The Special Representative will use a participatory and consultative approach to support cooperation and constructive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels to respond effectively to the continuum of violence that child victims face.

122. In view of the limited time that has elapsed since the Special Representative was appointed, the present report provides an overview of working methods and approach; she will provide more detail in her subsequent reports to the General Assembly.
