

## Extract of the Annual Report of Secretary-General on children and armed conflict covering 2017

A/72/865–S/2018/465

### Afghanistan

18. Conflict-related violence continued to severely affect children throughout Afghanistan, with 3,179 verified cases of children killed and maimed in 2017. Although the number of verified cases represents a 10 per cent decrease in verified cases compared to 2016, casualty rates remain very high.

#### *Grave violations*

19. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 84 boys, and documented an additional 643 cases (all boys). Children were recruited and used for combat, as bodyguards, at checkpoints, to assist in intelligence gathering and to plant improvised explosive devices. When recruited by armed groups, children were also used to carry out suicide attacks.

20. Almost three quarters of the verified cases were perpetrated by armed groups (61), with 40 cases attributed to the Taliban, 19 to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) and 2 to undetermined armed groups. Cases attributed to ISIL-KP almost doubled in the reporting period. A total of 23 boys were recruited and used by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (Afghan National Police, 11; Afghan Local Police, 9; other Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 3). The cases predominantly included the informal use of children, including as guards at checkpoints.

21. As at December 2017, the Government reported that 171 children were held in juvenile rehabilitation centres on national security-related charges. On 7 November, 50 juveniles were transferred from the adult maximum-security detention facility in Parwan to the juvenile rehabilitation centre in Kabul, following sustained United Nations advocacy. However, following a reassessment of their age, in December, 21 of them were moved back to the detention facility in Parwan and 25 were reassigned elsewhere.

22. The United Nations verified 3,179 child casualties (861 killed and 2,318 injured), including 251 girls, accounting for 30 per cent of all civilian casualties. Overall, the leading causes were ground engagements (45 per cent), followed by incidents involving improvised explosive devices (17 per cent) and unexploded ordnance (16 per cent).

23. The United Nations attributed 723 child casualties to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 28 to pro-government militias and 21 to both pro-government militias and Afghan National Defence and Security Forces; 96 casualties were attributed to international military forces. In addition, 45 casualties were attributed either to joint operations of Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and international military forces or could not be attributed specifically to either party. The continuing increase of child casualties resulting from aerial operations remains a concerning trend. In addition, 27 child casualties resulted from cross-border shelling out of Pakistan.

24. Armed groups perpetrated 1,384 child casualties, including 1,105 casualties attributed to the Taliban, 94 to ISIL-KP, 9 to joint operations of ISIL-KP and the Taliban and 176 to undetermined armed groups. Child casualties resulting from complex and suicide attacks increased by 34 per cent (207 casualties).

25. Four cases of sexual violence, including rape (1) and sexual abuse (3) against boys as young as 13 were verified, three of which were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and one to the Taliban. The United Nations documented an additional 78 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against boys, most of which related to the practice of *bacha bazi*. Impunity for perpetrators remains a serious challenge.

26. For the second consecutive year, verified incidents of attacks against schools and education personnel decreased (68 incidents). Armed groups perpetrated 55 of the incidents (Taliban, 41; ISIL-KP, 7; undetermined armed groups, 7). Furthermore, three such incidents were attributed to pro-government militias, two to Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, two to international military forces and two to cross-border shelling out of Pakistan.

27. A total of 58 incidents of attacks on hospitals and protected personnel were verified, a 50 per cent reduction compared to 2016. Incidents included direct attacks on health facilities (18), direct attacks on health personnel (18) and threats of attack (22). Among those, 52 incidents were attributed to armed groups (Taliban, 37; ISIL-KP, 4; undetermined armed groups, 11), and 5 to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

28. The United Nations verified 16 incidents of the military use of schools and hospitals: 10 by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 4 by the Taliban and 2 by ISIL-KP.

29. A total of 19 incidents of abduction, involving 41 boys and 2 girls, were verified. Among those cases, 32 were attributed to the Taliban, 6 to ISIL-KP (including the two girls), and 1 to a pro-government militia.

30. The United Nations documented 39 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, 29 of which were verified. All verified incidents were attributed to armed groups (Taliban, 22; ISIL-KP, 3; undetermined armed groups, 4). Incidents included the killing and injuring as well as the abduction of humanitarian personnel.

#### *Developments and concerns*

31. **Measures put in place to improve the protection of children.** I commend the Government for the measures taken to better protect children affected by armed conflict. These measures had a positive effect on the implementation of its action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and the use of children by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, including through the establishment of 12 new child protection units in Afghan National Police recruitment centres, the revision of the Penal Code, which now criminalizes the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and the practice of *bacha bazi*, as well as the adoption of a child protection policy.

32. Notwithstanding the progress made in preventing the formal recruitment of children, I urge the Government to address remaining gaps, in particular the lack of screening mechanisms in the Afghan Local Police, the use of children at police checkpoints, the absence of measures for the protection, reintegration and support of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups, as well as the lack of accountability for the perpetrators of grave violations against children. I strongly encourage the Government to prioritize prevention and consider alternatives to detention for children formerly associated with the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, pro-government militias or armed groups, in line with international juvenile justice principles, and ensure their reintegration into society.

33. While dialogue with armed groups regarding child protection continues, the level of violations has remained at an alarming level and I urge these parties to engage with the United Nations in pursuit of elaborating action plans.

34. I remain deeply concerned about the continuing high number of children killed and maimed and call on all parties to take immediate action to better protect children.

## Extract of the Annual Report of Secretary-General on children and armed conflict covering 2016

A/72/361–S/2017/821

### Afghanistan

20. The security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in 2016, with intensifying armed clashes between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban affecting children throughout the country. The United Nations verified 3,512 child casualties, the highest number ever recorded in the country and an increase of 24 per cent compared with 2015; almost 1 in 3 civilian casualties was a child casualty.

#### *Grave violations*

21. The United Nations verified 96 cases of child recruitment and use of children, double the number of cases verified in 2015. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators of recruitment and use of children, with 84 verified cases, of which 69 (including 1 girl) were attributed to the Taliban (a threefold increase compared with 2015); 10 to ISIL-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP), while 5 could not be attributed to a specific group. In addition, there were unverified reports of recruitment affecting more than 3,000 children, mostly by armed groups including Taliban and ISIL-KP.

22. A total of 11 verified cases of recruitment and use of children were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, of which 7 were perpetrated by the Afghan National Police; 2 by the Afghan Local Police; 1 by the Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police at a joint checkpoint; and 1 by the Afghan National Army, while 1 verified case was attributed to pro-government militias. In addition to being used as checkpoint guards or as bodyguards, 3 of the boys were reportedly also sexually abused and exploited for the purposes of bacha bazi.

23. As at December, the Government reported that 167 boys were held in juvenile rehabilitation centres on national security-related charges, including for association with armed groups. The United Nations remains concerned about the detention of these children in adult detention centres, particularly the large increase in children detained in the maximum-security detention facility in Parwan, where 133 juveniles were held in December compared with 53 juveniles held in January.

24. The United Nations verified 3,512 child casualties in Afghanistan in 2016 (923 killed and 2,589 injured). Ground engagements and explosive remnants of war were the leading causes.

25. Of these, 273 children were killed and 674 injured by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 12 were killed and 41 injured by the pro-government militias and 3 were injured in joint operations of Afghan National Defence and Security Forces/pro-government militias. In addition, 87 casualties were attributed to international military forces, 19 were attributed to joint operations involving Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, pro-government militias or international military forces and 19 were attributed to undetermined armed forces. Trends of concern include a doubling of child casualties (200) resulting from air strikes and a 33 per cent increase of child casualties attributed to pro-government militias. In addition, 10 child casualties resulted from cross-border shelling from Pakistan.

26. Armed groups perpetrated 1,447 child casualties, including 1,093 attributed to the Taliban, 100 attributed to ISIL-KP, 4 attributed to Hizb-i Islami, 1 attributed to the Haqqani Network, 7 attributed to two or more groups and 242 to undetermined armed groups.

27. The United Nations verified 7 cases of sexual violence: 5 incidents were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and 2 to the Taliban. These incidents included children being raped at Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police checkpoints as well as the abduction and forced marriage of a nine-year-old girl by the Taliban. As at early 2017, the United Nations had not received any information regarding actions taken against the perpetrators.

28. Verified attacks on schools and education personnel decreased to 77 incidents, compared with 132 in 2015. Intensive fighting between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban led to schools being hit in crossfire. Of the verified incidents, 51 were attributed to the Taliban, 7 to ISIL-KP and 12 to undetermined armed groups; 23 incidents directly targeted girls' education; 4 incidents were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (3 to the Afghan National Army, 1 undetermined); and 1 incident was jointly attributed to the Afghan National Army and the Taliban.

29. The United Nations verified 118 incidents of attacks on health facilities and personnel, of which 106 were attributed to armed groups, including 84 to the Taliban, 1 to Hizb-i-Islami and 1 to ISIL-KP. The targeting of, and threats against, polio workers by armed groups remained a particular concern.<sup>1</sup> In addition, 9 incidents were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 1 was attributed to pro-government militias and 1 was jointly attributed to the Afghan National Army and international military forces.

30. The United Nations also documented the military use of 34 schools and 13 health facilities by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. In addition, 1 school was used by pro-government militias. Armed groups were responsible for the military use of 7 schools and 10 health facilities. In a positive development, in 2016 the Ministry of Education promulgated two directives instructing the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to stop using schools for military purposes.

31. The United Nations verified 10 incidents of abduction affecting 20 boys and 1 girl. A total of 13 children were abducted by armed groups (11 by the Taliban and 2 by ISIL-KP), including on account of their perceived affiliation with the Government; 1 verified incident was attributed to the Afghan National Army and 1 to the Afghan Local Police, affecting 8 children; and in September, the Afghan National Army took 7 boys from a school to pressure the Taliban to release a soldier.

32. Of 155 reported incidents of denial of humanitarian access, 98 were verified, including 46 incidents of threats and 10 incidents of attacks against humanitarian workers. Armed groups perpetrated 94 incidents, including the abduction of humanitarian workers; 2 incidents were also attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

### *Developments and concerns*

33. I commend the Government for the significant progress made in implementing its action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, notably through the establishment of child protection units in Afghan National Police recruitment

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<sup>1</sup> According to information provided by the World Health Organization, Afghanistan is one of three remaining polio-endemic countries in the world.

centres and the issuance of ministerial directives, including the decision of the National Directorate for Security prohibiting the transfer of children to the detention facility in Parwan.

34. Notwithstanding this progress, I am concerned that children continue to be detained in the detention facility in Parwan, and I call upon the Government to transfer them to juvenile rehabilitation centres in accordance with national directives and in line with international obligations under international law and international standards. Moreover, while important advances to strengthen age assessment processes in Afghan National Police recruitment centres were realized, the lack of corresponding procedures for Afghan Local Police recruitment, as well as the continued reliance on pro-government militias for which no recruitment oversight mechanisms are evident, remain cause for concern.

35. Lastly, regarding killing and maiming, I am deeply concerned about the increase of child casualties and urge the Government and other parties to conflict to take urgent action to better protect children.

## Extract of the Annual Report of Secretary-General on children and armed conflict covering 2015

A/69/926\*-S/2015/409\*

### Afghanistan

26. The Government of Afghanistan faced sustained security challenges in the reporting period, most notably following the presidential elections. In my previous annual report, I highlighted the significant spike in the killing and maiming of children in Afghanistan. In 2014, the reported number increased by 48 per cent, to 2,502 child casualties.

27. The United Nations documented the recruitment and use of 68 children (65 boys, 3 girls) of which 22 were verified (all boys), one each by the Afghan National Police and the Afghan local police and 20 associated with the Taliban and other armed groups. This marks a decrease in child recruitment and use in Afghanistan compared with 2013, when 97 children were reportedly recruited and used. However, owing to widespread underreporting, these figures do not accurately reflect the situation. In a worrisome trend, the Taliban continued to recruit children to carry out suicide attacks and to plant improvised explosive devices, and used them in active combat and as spies. For example, on 9 February, a 14-year-old suicide bomber detonated explosives near an Afghan National Security Forces checkpoint in Sharan district, injuring six civilians and five national police officers. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

28. The pilot child protection units in the national police in four provinces reportedly prevented 156 children from enlisting, indicating a potential for a large and beneficial impact if such units are replicated across the country. In addition, the local police reported 55 cases of rejected underage applicants.

29. As at December, according to the Ministry of Justice, 258 boys were held in juvenile rehabilitation centres across the country on national security-related charges, including association with armed groups. Of 105 child detainees interviewed by the United Nations between February 2013 and December 2014, 44 reported having been subjected to ill-treatment or torture.

30. The increase in child casualties included at least 710 children killed and 1,792 injured in 1,091 separate incidents. Armed groups, including the Taliban and the Hizb-e-Islami, were responsible for 1,343 child casualties (392 killed, 951 injured), Afghan national security forces for 396 (126 killed, 270 injured), and international military forces for 38 (24 killed, 14 injured). Cross-border shelling from Pakistan resulted in 57 child casualties (5 killed, 52 injured). The United Nations was unable to attribute 668 child casualties (163 killed, 505 injured), particularly in incidents of crossfire.

31. Ground engagements were the leading cause of child casualties, resulting in the killing of 311 children and injury to 920 others, nearly double the number in 2013. Attacks with improvised explosive devices by armed groups caused 664 child casualties. Suicide attacks resulted in 214 child casualties, up by 80 per cent compared to the previous year. Explosive remnants of war killed or maimed 328 children. Air strikes by international military forces resulted in 38 child casualties, including eight from drone strikes.

32. In nine incidents, eight boys and six girls reportedly were victims of sexual violence. Of these, five cases, affecting four girls and two boys, were verified. Four verified incidents were attributed to the

national police, and one incident to a pro-Government militia commander. On a positive note, regarding accountability, a local police member from Laghman Province was sentenced in March to 10 years of imprisonment for sexual assault and attempted rape of a seven-year-old boy.

33. Schools were attacked in 163 verified incidents, including 29 attacks or threats of attack against protected personnel and 28 incidents of placement of improvised explosive devices inside school premises. Several attacks were related to the use of schools as polling stations. A total of 94 incidents were attributed to the Taliban and other armed groups, 1 to international forces and 68 incidents that could not be attributed. Girls' education was particularly targeted by the Taliban, including the distribution of leaflets with serious threats against students, intimidation of female teachers, attacks on school personnel for not complying with the Taliban's demand to close schools, and attacks on students on their way to school. At least 469 Afghan schools remained closed because of insecurity.

34. At least 10 health-care personnel were killed and 14 were abducted. Health facilities continued to be attacked directly or as collateral damage. A total of 38 verified incidents were attributed to armed groups, including 13 to the Taliban, and 4 to the Afghan national security forces, including forced entries into health facilities in search of alleged armed group elements.

35. The United Nations verified 11 cases of military use of schools by the Taliban (3), Afghan National Army (3), the local police (3), the national police (1), and other Afghan national security forces units (1), as well as 3 incidents of military use of hospitals by the national police and the Taliban.

36. Twenty-four boys and two girls were abducted in 17 separate incidents, resulting in the killing of at least four boys by the Taliban, the rape of two girls by the local police, and the rape of a boy by a pro-Government militia. Overall, the Taliban abducted 15 boys, accusing them of being Government spies.

37. The United Nations verified 72 of 83 reported incidents affecting humanitarian access to children. There were 125 abductions of humanitarian personnel, the killing and injuring of 41, and 9 attacks on humanitarian convoys, including 2 United Nations convoys. Armed groups, notably the Taliban, were responsible for 85 per cent of all verified incidents, including intimidation of humanitarian personnel.

38. In a welcome development, in July, the Government officially endorsed a road map for compliance with the action plan to end and prevent child recruitment into its security forces. Significant progress was made on three of five priority actions, in particular the adoption of a presidential decree criminalizing child recruitment by Government security forces, which came into effect on 2 February 2015. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior issued and disseminated a directive prohibiting the use of children at national police and local police checkpoints, including in support roles, stating that the perpetrators would be sanctioned. Efforts also continued to strengthen age assessment procedures and disseminate guidance to recruitment units.

39. Despite the progress achieved, significant efforts are needed by all actors to fully implement the action plan. The lack of services for children rejected from recruitment or released from active service remained a significant concern. Moreover, I urge the Government of Afghanistan to address widespread impunity for violations of children's rights, particularly within the national police and local police, and investigate the allegations of torture. I condemn the grave violations committed against children by armed groups, including the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Hezb-i-Islami and urge them to immediately end all grave violations against children.