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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Protection of children affected by armed conflict

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly, in accordance with section VIII of Assembly resolution 53/128 of 9 December 1998, the report prepared by Olara A. Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

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Children and Armed Conflict****Contents**

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I. Introduction

A. Second annual report

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to section II of General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, in which the Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to submit to it an annual report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. The present report, the second since the mandate was established, covers activities undertaken by the Special Representative in the period since the first annual report (A/53/482) of 12 October 1998.

2. When the Secretary-General appointed Olara A. Otunnu as his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in September 1997, he stressed the urgent need for a public advocate and moral voice on behalf of children who are being abused and brutalized in situations of armed conflict. In that context, the Special Representative has identified and been developing the following as the core activities in implementation of his mandate:

- (a) Public advocacy to build greater awareness and to mobilize the international community for action;
- (b) Promoting the application of international norms and traditional value systems that provide for the protection of children in times of conflict;
- (c) Undertaking political and humanitarian diplomacy and proposing concrete initiatives to protect children in the midst of war;
- (d) Making the protection and welfare of children a central concern in peace processes and in post-conflict programmes for healing and rebuilding.

3. The Special Representative would like to pay a very special tribute to Graça Machel of Mozambique and South Africa for her singular contribution in laying a strong foundation for the activities of the present mandate. Her ground-breaking report, entitled "Impact of armed conflict on children" (A/51/306 and Add. 1), which was submitted to the General Assembly in 1996, provided the first comprehensive and most compelling assessment of the multiple ways in which children's rights are being violated in the context of armed conflict.

4. The Special Representative also wishes to pay tribute for the frontline work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food

Programme (WFP) and the European Commission, strongly supported by the community of international and local non-governmental organizations. Their role, together with the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is crucial in translating our common concern into operational activities on the ground.

B. Setting up the office of the Special Representative

5. The process of setting up the office of the Special Representative advanced slowly during the reporting period. After operating with three staff members for most of the year, the staff now consists of four programme officers and some consultants; in addition, the new director of the office assumed his duties in August 1999.

6. The Special Representative has continued to seek voluntary contributions for the activities of the office. He is very grateful for the generous contributions received from the Governments of the following countries: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America. Additional and sustained financial support for the trust fund is necessary to maintain and strengthen the activities of the office.

II. Impact of armed conflict on children

A. The context

7. In spite of the injunction of the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, which enjoins us to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, we are witnessing an abomination, an abomination directed against children in the context of armed conflict. A large and growing number of innocent children — numbering in the millions — are still the victims of war, as its targets or as its instruments.

8. Today, in approximately 50 countries around the world, children are suffering in the midst of armed conflict and in its aftermath: children are being killed and made

orphans; children are being maimed, uprooted from their homes, raped and sexually abused; children are being deprived of education and health care; they are being exploited as child soldiers and left with deep emotional scars and trauma.

9. All non-combatants are entitled to protection, but children have a primary claim to that protection. Children are innocent and especially vulnerable. Children are less equipped to adapt or respond to conflict. They are the least responsible for conflict, yet suffer disproportionately from its excesses. Children are truly blameless victims of conflict. Moreover, children represent the hopes and future of every society: destroy them and you have destroyed a society.

10. Over the last decade, 2 million children have been killed in conflict situations, over 1 million have been made orphans, over 6 million have been seriously injured or permanently disabled and over 10 million have been left with grave psychological trauma. A large number of children, especially young women, have been made the targets of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a deliberate instrument of war.

11. At the present moment, there are over 20 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Some 300,000 young persons under the age of 18 are currently being exploited as child soldiers around the world. And approximately 800 children are killed or maimed by landmines every month.

12. The magnitude of this abomination attests to a new phenomenon. There has been a qualitative shift in the nature and conduct of warfare: this is not war as we have known it in the modern era.

13. Several developments mark this transformation. Almost all the major armed conflicts in the world today are civil wars; they are protracted, lasting years if not decades; they are fought among those who know each other well — they pit compatriot against compatriot, neighbour against neighbour. They are characterized by widespread social breakdown and lawlessness, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines and the involvement of multiple and often semi-autonomous armed groups. Most cynically, children have been compelled to become themselves the instruments of war — indeed the weapon of choice — recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers. A key feature of this struggle is the demonization of the so-called “enemy community” — often defined in religious, ethnic, racial or regional terms — and the orchestration of vicious hate campaigns. In the intense and intimate setting of today’s

internecine wars, the village has become the battlefield and civilian populations the primary target. This is soldier-on-civilian violence on an unprecedented scale.

14. Moreover, many societies exposed to protracted conflicts have seen their community values radically undermined, if not shattered altogether. This has given rise to a crisis of values — an “ethical vacuum” — a setting in which international standards are ignored with impunity and where traditional value systems have lost their sway.

15. It is against this background that today up to 90 per cent, compared with 5 per cent in the First World War and 48 per cent in the Second World War, of casualties in ongoing conflicts around the world are civilians, the vast majority of them children and women.

16. These excesses are no longer exceptional; they are widespread across the globe; they are going on today in some 30 locations of conflict.

B. The many faces of suffering

17. Although the exact fate of a child may vary according to the particular circumstances of a conflict situation, the following emerge as the main themes of victimization for children.

1. Children maimed and killed

18. Civilian populations, predominantly children and women, have become the primary targets for attacks by armed factions. Moreover, in today’s civil conflicts, children are often specifically targeted to eliminate the next generation of potential adversaries.

2. Children uprooted from home and community

19. Children and women comprise close to 80 per cent of the forcibly displaced populations of the world. Children alone constitute 20 million displaced persons, or well over half of the populations uprooted within their countries and those who have sought refuge beyond their national borders.

3. Children facing survival issues

20. The destruction of homes and social services, combined with forced displacements of populations, often places children in a very dangerous and precarious situation. Millions of children, especially in the immediate aftermath of forced displacement or when there is limited humanitarian access to affected populations, are exposed

to disease, malnutrition and risk of death as a result of lack of food, water, medication, sanitary conditions, shelter and clothing.

4. Children made orphans

21. Armed conflicts permanently change the lives of children overnight when children become orphans because their parents have been killed. In Rwanda, thousands of children are now the heads of households in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide.

5. Children separated from their parents

22. Virtually every armed conflict has separated a large number of children from their parents and families, whether temporarily or permanently. Children may remain unaccompanied in camps for displaced communities or foster homes for long periods of time while awaiting tracing and family reunification.

6. Children subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation

23. Children, especially girls, have been made targets of sexual abuse and gender-based violence on a large scale. The victims' trauma is compounded by the prevalence of social stigma and reticence to address the issue.

7. Children used as combatants

24. In today's conflicts, children are not just victims, they have been made perpetrators of violence as well. Children have been compelled to become instruments of war, systematically recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers, thus being forced to give violent expression to the hatred of adults. Some 300,000 young persons below the age of 18 are currently participating in over 30 armed conflicts around the world — as frontline combatants, porters, sexual slaves, messengers or spies.

8. Children suffering from trauma

25. Children who have been exposed to violence and killing, displacement, violation or loss of loved ones carry with them the scars of fear and hatred. Unless such conditions are detected and addressed, through modern and traditional methods of healing, the abused children of today could grow up to become the abusers of tomorrow.

9. Children deprived of their education

26. Education is an early and long-term casualty of war. When educational facilities and opportunities are destroyed and children are forced to flee or learn to kill, the children of conflict grow up without the knowledge and skills needed to build their own futures and the futures of their communities. The lives destroyed and the opportunities lost can have devastating consequences for society's long-term stability and development.

III. Action and initiatives to protect children affected by conflict

27. There is a danger that the international community may be exposed to so much that it could come to regard as normal a phenomenon that in fact represents a radical departure from the fundamental norms of conduct acceptable to all societies. This must not be allowed to happen.

28. This trend of abomination can be reversed if serious, concerted measures are employed at both the national and international levels. In that connection, the Special Representative has been pursuing the following action and initiatives.

A. Launching an "era of application" for international norms

29. Over the past 50 years, the countries of the world have developed an impressive body of international human rights and humanitarian instruments. Several of these provide for the rights, protection and welfare of children. The most pertinent are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (resolution 217 A (III)), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (resolution 44/25, annex), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Landmines and on Their Destruction (the Ottawa Convention), which entered into force in March 1999, and the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto of 1977.

30. The impact of these instruments remains woefully thin on the ground, however. Words on paper cannot save children and women in peril. The Special Representative believes that the time has come for the international community to redirect its energies from the juridical task of the elaboration of norms to the political project of

ensuring their application and respect on the ground. This can be accomplished if the international community is prepared to employ its considerable collective influence to that end.

B. Promoting and reinforcing local value systems

31. Societies throughout history have recognized the fundamental obligation to protect children from harm, even in times of conflict. In most societies, taboos and injunctions proscribing indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations, especially children and women, were maintained.

32. But today in so many conflicts around the world, there is a “free-for-all” — children, women, the elderly, granaries, crops, livestock — all have become fair game in the single-minded struggle for power, in an attempt not just to subdue but to annihilate the “enemy community” altogether. As a Kenyan elder from El Das observed recently, “In our tradition, men fight men. But now they are targeting women, children and the elderly.” This is the phenomenon of “total war”.

33. The Special Representative believes that humankind must mobilize all its resources and social networks — especially parents, extended family, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions — to reclaim and reassert those values and taboos which have traditionally been instrumental in protecting children and women in times of conflict. The mainstay of that effort must be the local community. The process should then be integrated with and reinforced by contemporary international norms. Such a process of ethical renewal is essential if a society caught in the throes of a deep moral and political crisis is to recover, rebuild and move forward.

C. Taking concrete initiatives in the midst of war

34. The Special Representative has pursued concrete initiatives to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children who are caught up in the midst of ongoing conflicts, thus seeking to translate the concept of “children as a zone of peace” into practical arrangements and measures on the ground.

35. In his visits to several countries — from Sri Lanka to Burundi, from the Sudan to Colombia to Sierra Leone,

to discussions with the Congolese Rally for Democracy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — the Special Representative has been successful in getting parties in conflict to commit themselves to some of the following measures: not to target civilian populations; to allow access to populations in distress within their zones of control; not to interfere with the distribution of relief supplies; to observe humanitarian ceasefires for purposes of vaccination or supply of relief; not to attack schools or hospitals; not to use landmines; and not to recruit or use children as child soldiers. The international community must steadfastly hold them to those commitments.

D. Placing the protection and welfare of children on peace agendas

36. Children suffer disproportionately in times of war. They therefore have the highest stake in peace. For that reason, the Special Representative has been working to ensure that their protection and needs feature prominently in any negotiations to end war and in peace accords. During his recent visits to Burundi, Colombia, Sierra Leone and the Sudan, Governments and insurgency groups have agreed to place the protection and welfare of children on the agendas of the peace processes currently under way in their countries.

E. Making the protection and welfare of children a central concern in post-conflict programmes

37. One of the greatest challenges a country faces after war is the “crisis of young people” — the desperate conditions of very young children and adolescents. The prospects for recovery in many countries depend very much on rehabilitating those young people and restoring to them a sense of renewed hope. The Special Representative has called on the key actors responsible for designing post-conflict peace-building programmes, in particular national Governments, the World Bank, the European Union, UNDP and other relevant United Nations agencies, bilateral aid agencies and non-governmental organizations, to make the needs of children a central concern from the outset of their planning, programming and resource allocation.

38. Some of the core issues around which the Special Representative seeks to mobilize concerted and effective response include demobilization and reintegration of child

combatants; return, reunion and resettlement of displaced children and families; programmes for mine-awareness and rehabilitation of child victims of landmines; programmes for physical and psychosocial rehabilitation for the injured, the maimed and the traumatized; and provision and rehabilitation of basic medical and educational services.

F. Integrating child protection into United Nations peace operations

39. The Special Representative believes that special attention must be given to the protection and welfare of children in United Nations-mandated peace operations. To achieve that objective, he has proposed the systematic incorporation of three elements. Firstly, protection and the needs of children must be firmly entrenched in the mandate of peacekeeping operations. Secondly, in order to ensure implementation of that dimension of the mandate and to advise the Special Representative in a given country, there must be a senior officer explicitly responsible for ensuring coordination for the protection and welfare of children. Thirdly, appropriate training must be given to peacekeeping personnel — both civilian and military — concerning the protection of the rights of children and women.

G. Providing for children in times of “imperfect peace”

40. Many countries are caught in the gray and unpredictable zone between peace and war because of protracted conflicts or prolonged transitions to peace. The Special Representative has observed the phenomenon at first hand on several of his recent visits, including in Burundi, Colombia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the Sudan.

41. Traditionally donors and multilateral institutions have been reluctant to bridge the “relief-to-development gap”. This means that the needs of children are not systematically addressed for years. Even in situations of “imperfect peace”, opportunities and space often exist for addressing the needs of children with regard to the provision of health care, education, resettlement and rehabilitation. To meet those needs, however, will require adjustment in the prevailing theory and policy of development assistance.

H. Developing neighbourhood initiatives

42. Although most of today’s armed conflicts are internal, the victimization of children is often exacerbated by cross-border activities, such as the flow of small arms and light weapons, the transfer and use of landmines, the recruitment and abduction of children and the movement of displaced populations and the separation of families. Threats facing children within countries in conflict often cannot be brought under control without addressing those cross-border dimensions.

43. The Special Representative has therefore proposed the development of “neighbourhood initiatives” to bring together actors in a subregional setting where countries are linked by cross-border activities affecting children. The purpose is to engage Governments, insurgency groups, civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies in dialogue that would ultimately lead to specific agreements and concrete measures to protect children from cross-border threats. The Special Representative has convened an informal inter-agency task force to develop this initiative under the leadership of UNHCR and UNICEF. So far, three neighbourhood initiatives have been selected as pilot cases: eastern Africa (neighbourhood of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development); West Africa (neighbourhood of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone); and Kosovo and its neighbourhood.

I. Working to end recruitment and use of children in conflict

44. The widespread participation of children in armed conflict is one of the most horrendous and cynical trends of recent wars. Various conditions give rise to children’s participation in armed conflict: manpower shortages typical of protracted conflicts, the fact that children are impressionable and therefore can be easily fashioned into ruthless and unquestioning tools of war and the desire of armed groups to exercise total control over civilian populations — all have led to forced recruitment of children. Others may join armed forces or groups because of a socio-economic breakdown that eliminates viable alternatives. Still others are lured by the appeal of political, religious or ethnic ideology.

45. To stem the tide of the massive use of children as soldiers, the Special Representative has proposed and is pursuing a three-pronged approach. Firstly, he strongly supports raising the age limit for recruitment and participation in armed conflict from 15 to 18. Secondly,

and in tandem with the efforts to raise the age limit, he believes there is an urgent need to mobilize right away a major movement of international pressure to lean on armed groups that are currently abusing children as combatants. Thirdly, he believes that it is important to address the political, social and economic factors that create an environment that facilitates the exploitation of children in this way.

46. The Special Representative has continued to support the work of the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child; he addressed the fifth session of the working group in January.

J. Curbing the flow of small arms

47. There is no doubt that there is a strong correlation between the easy availability of small arms and the dramatic rise in the victimization of children and women. Moreover, the proliferation of those weapons has made it possible for very young children to be used as perpetrators of violence. The Special Representative has been very active in various efforts to raise awareness on the issue and to curb that trend. He actively promoted the founding and strongly supports the activities of the International Action Network on Small Arms. He also participates actively in the United Nations mechanism for coordinating action on small arms.

K. Protecting children from the impact of sanctions

48. All efforts should be made to relieve the suffering of children living under sanctions regimes. Whenever the Security Council adopts measures under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, it is important to give consideration to their impact on children and to provide appropriate humanitarian exemptions.

49. In that connection, the Special Representative supported and welcomed the suspension of regional sanctions against Burundi. He has found the recent report of 12 August 1999 by UNICEF on the effects of sanctions on the children of Iraq very disturbing and has called on the Security Council to give serious consideration to it.

L. Providing protection and relief for internally displaced communities

50. Most people fleeing armed conflict do so within the borders of their own countries. They are unable or reluctant to leave their homelands and increasingly find countries of asylum less willing to accept them. Over 25 million persons are currently displaced within their own national borders, compared with under 12 million refugees registered by UNHCR, well over half of whom are children.

51. The nature and scope of the problem have been well described through the important work and reports of Francis Deng, the Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons, with whom the Special Representative has continued to work very closely on the issue. He welcomes the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee¹ and calls for their wide dissemination and use by Governments, parties in conflict and the humanitarian community.

52. On all his missions in the past year, the Special Representative witnessed the deeply distressing and precarious conditions of internally displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are children and women. The time has come for the international community to develop a more systematic response and framework for providing protection and practical support to internally displaced persons.

M. Mobilizing support for new international instruments

53. The Special Representative has continued, in discussions with Governments and through public advocacy, to mobilize support for the signing and ratification of the following new international legal instruments that provide for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

54. Firstly, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (A/CONF.183/9), adopted in June 1998, provides for jurisdiction over several child-specific crimes. Conscription or enlisting children under the age of 15 or using them to participate actively in hostilities has been designated a war crime. Intentional attacks against, *inter alia*, hospitals and buildings dedicated to education are also war crimes. Particularly grave forms of sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, are both war crimes and crimes against humanity. The forcible transfer of the children of a group targeted for intentional destruction constitutes genocide for the purposes of the International Criminal Court.

55. The Office of the Special Representative is following the drafting of the Court's rules of evidence and procedure and the elements of the crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court to help ensure that they adequately reflect the protection and interests of children.

56. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is very significant for the protection of children: it is a powerful tool that considerably reinforces advocacy for children; it establishes international criminal jurisdiction over individuals responsible for the most serious crimes against children; and it should serve as a deterrent to such crimes.

57. Secondly, the Special Representative strongly supported the move to include child soldiering among the worst forms of labour, prohibited by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which was adopted in June 1999. The ILO Convention defines a child as anyone below 18 years of age and prohibits the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.

58. Thirdly, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child prohibits the recruitment or direct participation in hostilities of any person under the age of 18.

N. "Voice of Children" project

59. The absence of and hunger for information, recreation and entertainment among children in situations of conflict and in its aftermath are often very striking. The Special Representative has advocated the establishment of local radio stations or programmes, "Voice of Children", devoted mainly to the needs and interests of children in such situations. This would serve to give voice to children's concerns, offer education and entertainment, promote tolerance and reconciliation, and raise awareness about the rights and protection of children. Such projects, while locally driven, require strong support from international partners. The Special Representative has also encouraged several international broadcasting networks to produce programmes specifically targeted at war-affected children.

O. Building local capacities for protection and advocacy

60. It is critical to build and strengthen local capacities for protection and advocacy for children affected by armed conflict, both in the midst of ongoing violence and in its aftermath. In that connection, the Special Representative has advocated a number of initiatives: the establishment of a national commission for children to ensure that the protection and welfare of children are a major priority in the aftermath of conflict and that this is reflected in national priority-setting, policy-making and resource allocation; the formation of informal groups of elders and statesmen to serve as local advocates within a country; and the formation of a parliamentary caucus for the protection of children.

61. He has also called on the donor community, international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies to do much more to support and strengthen local non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations.

IV. Engaging key actors

62. The Special Representative seeks to engage key national and international actors, encouraging them to adopt the above agenda as their own. Among them are the following actors.

A. Governments

63. The primary responsibility for protecting children and applying relevant international and local norms lies with Governments. The Special Representative has held discussions in capitals and elsewhere with political and government leaders to convey that message and to seek their support for it. An informal support group known as the Friends of the Special Representative has continued to play a very active and most helpful role by providing support and advice and by highlighting the issue within their own government structures and in important forums such as the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

B. Security Council

64. Since his appointment, the Special Representative has made it a priority to work to ensure that the protection of children affected by armed conflict becomes a major concern on the agenda of the Security Council. Following

the first open debate on the issue and the statement by the President of the Security Council in June 1998 (see S/PRST/1998/18), the Special Representative has continued to encourage a deeper engagement on the matter by the Council.

65. On 12 February 1999, the Special Representative was invited, together with the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Executive Director of UNICEF, to address the Security Council in its open debate on the item "Protection of civilians in armed conflict". Subsequently, the office of the Special Representative, working closely with UNICEF, participated actively in the preparation of the Secretary-General's report on the subject (S/1999/957), to ensure that children's concerns were fully incorporated into it. The Secretary-General's report was discussed by the Council on 16 and 17 September, at the conclusion of which it adopted resolution 1265 (1999).

66. A most significant occasion for children came on 25 August 1999, when the Security Council held the second open debate on the item "Children and armed conflict". The Special Representative was invited to address the Council and, following a day-long debate, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1261 (1999).

67. The resolution incorporates a number of concerns that have been at the core of the Special Representative's advocacy work. In it the Security Council condemns the targeting of children; recognizes the protection and welfare of children as an issue to be addressed during peace processes; urges parties to conflict to abide by commitments they make to ensure the protection of children; calls for an end to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict; and calls for the demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers. The Council has undertaken, when taking action to promote peace and security, to give special attention to the protection, rights and welfare of children; to give consideration to the impact of sanctions on children; and to ensure that personnel involved in peace operations receive appropriate training.

68. Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) is a major landmark for the cause of children affected by armed conflict. Firstly, for the first time ever, the Security Council has devoted a formal resolution entirely to the protection of children, thus demonstrating its commitment to the issue. Secondly, the resolution sets out a number of important measures for protecting children, which, when applied in specific situations, would have a considerable impact. Thirdly, adoption of the resolution has finally given full "legitimacy" to the protection of children as an

issue that properly belongs to the agenda of the Council. Fourthly, the Council has requested the Secretary-General to provide a report by July 2000 on the implementation of the resolution, thus signaling that the issue will now remain an ongoing preoccupation on its agenda.

69. Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) provides a most important tool for advocacy on behalf of children affected by conflict. The Special Representative calls on all who are concerned for the protection of children to fully use this new advocacy tool and to encourage the Council itself to apply the measures contained in the resolution in its future consideration of specific crisis situations and in the mandating of peace operations.

C. European Union

70. In the course of the past year, the Special Representative has made it a priority to establish strong cooperation with the European Union and its institutions. His objective has been to encourage the Union to make the protection of children affected by armed conflict a significant aspect of its own agenda. His efforts have concentrated on developing initiatives in collaboration with three main bodies: the European Commission; the European Parliament; and the Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP)-European Union framework of cooperation, which brings together 71 States from the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions and the 15 States members of the Union.

71. *European Commission.* The Special Representative has held regular consultations with European Union commissioners in Brussels, in particular with the Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs and the Commissioner for Development, as well as with an inter-service group of senior officials drawn from Directorates-General concerned with external relations, social affairs, development, humanitarian affairs, human rights and the management of aid to non-member countries. In those discussions, the Special Representative has urged the European Commission to incorporate the protection and welfare of children affected by armed conflict into its advocacy agenda and programme activities. He requested in particular that a special budget line be created for the benefit of children affected by war.

72. The Special Representative was very encouraged to learn recently from the European Commission that the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, including those of child soldiers, had been included as one

of five thematic priorities for 1999 within the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights.

73. *European Parliament.* The Special Representative held discussions with the chairpersons of the Committee for Development and of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy, as well as with a cross-section of members of the European Parliament, seeking to obtain their political and advocacy support for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The two chairpersons agreed in principle to hold joint hearings on the issue. In November 1998, the Special Representative also addressed the Committee for Development on the issue of child soldiers; subsequently, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the recruitment and use of children as soldiers and expressed support for raising the age limit for recruitment to 18.

74. *ACP-European Union Cooperation Agreement.* The Special Representative has proposed the inclusion of the protection and rights of children, especially children affected by armed conflict, in the successor agreement, now under negotiation, to the current fourth Lomé Convention. To that end, he has held a series of consultations with the key actors, within the framework of the ACP-European Union Cooperation Agreement, including the President of ACP-European Union Joint Assembly, the Secretary-General of ACP and ambassadors from ACP countries. In March 1999, he was invited to address the Joint Assembly of the two bodies in Strasbourg.

75. In that connection, the Special Representative was very pleased to learn recently from the Secretary-General of ACP that several elements he had advocated had been endorsed by the ACP-European Union Ministerial Negotiating Conference and had been included in the current working documents:

- (a) Protecting the rights of children and youth, especially the girl child;
- (b) Helping community-based institutions to ensure the protection and development of children;
- (c) Rehabilitation and reintegration of children in post-conflict situations;
- (d) Demobilization and reintegration of ex-child combatants.

76. The inclusion of those elements in the final agreement would represent a particularly important development for the protection and welfare of children: it would break new ground in the context of a development cooperation agreement; it would provide a major new advocacy tool for the protection of children; and it would

provide funding under the new ACP-European Union cooperation agreement for the specific benefit of children affected by armed conflict.

77. The Special Representative will be working closely with the key actors during the current period of negotiations and, once the agreement is finalized, to assist with follow-up initiatives.

D. Regional organizations

78. The Special Representative has encouraged the development of appropriate regional advocacy, commitments and initiatives for the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

79. The Special Representative is engaged in building partnerships with several regional and subregional organizations, including the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the Council of Europe, the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

80. In the reporting period, the Special Representative met with the Secretaries-General of OAS, the Commonwealth, OAU, OIC and SAARC. The Special Representative also addressed the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

E. Opinion leaders

81. As public advocate, the Special Representative seeks to broaden the circle of constituencies and opinion leaders who could lend their support to the cause of children affected by armed conflict.

82. In the reporting period, the Special Representative has addressed a number of forums and audiences, including the Hague Appeal for Peace Civil Society Conference; the Christians for Europe Foundation conference in Brussels; the Conference on Protection of children and adolescents in complex emergencies, held in Oslo; the Tokyo Symposium on Children and Armed Conflict; the Alistair Berkeley Memorial Lecture at the London School of Economics on "Children in Extreme Situations"; the One World Broadcasting Trust's annual conference on the media and children's rights, held in London; the

conference organized by the Spanish National Committee for UNICEF on children and armed conflict; the annual conference of International Alert in London; the Carnegie Council on Ethics in International Affairs in New York; and the Hilton Foundation's annual conference on humanitarian crises — preventive measures through human rights, held in New York.

83. The Special Representative has encouraged the holding of regional symposia as an important outreach activity. A regional symposium was held in Tokyo in November 1998, organized by the Government of Japan and the Japan Committee for UNICEF, in cooperation with the office of the Special Representative. The twin objectives were to raise the awareness of Governments and non-governmental actors in the Asia-Pacific region and to generate awareness and support within the Japanese public.

84. The Special Representative has established wide links with academic and research institutions to promote research to fill knowledge gaps in important areas affecting children and women caught up in conflict. He seeks their perspectives on conflicts and their impact on children and encourages independent assessment of "lessons learned", "best practices" and "concerted response" in affected countries. An important consultation was held with a group of scholars in September 1999.

V. Field missions and country initiatives for children

85. In carrying out his mandate, the Special Representative has placed particular emphasis on field missions to assess first-hand the situation of children caught in the midst of armed conflict or its aftermath. During his visits, the Special Representative has sought to obtain commitments for the protection of children from parties to conflict and to heighten public awareness of their plight. He has lent his support to the negotiation of humanitarian space for the benefit of children and other civilian victims of armed conflict.

86. In the country visits the Special Representative has relied upon the invaluable collaboration and support of the United Nations country teams, especially the resident coordinators, UNICEF and UNHCR, and a number of non-governmental organizations.

87. During the reporting period, the Special Representative visited Rwanda, Burundi, the Sudan, Kosovo refugees in Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mozambique, Colombia and Sierra

Leone. The office of the Special Representative has maintained a watching brief on many other countries where children were affected by armed conflict. On the visits to Burundi, Rwanda and the Sudan he was accompanied by Anna Cataldi, a "Messenger of Peace" appointed by the Secretary-General, and on his visit to Colombia by Catherine von Heidenstam, chairperson of the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A. Rwanda

88. The Special Representative visited Rwanda from 21 to 24 February 1999 to bear witness to the situation of children affected by the genocide of 1994. During his visit, he met with government officials, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Amri Sued; Patrick Mazimhaka, Minister of the President's Office; Jean de Dieu Mucyo, Minister for Justice; Donat Kaberuka, Minister for Finance and Economic Planning; Charles Ntakirutinka, Minister for Social Affairs; and François Ngarambe, Minister for Youth, Culture and Sports, as well as other senior government officials. He held meetings with the United Nations country team, representatives of the diplomatic corps, representative of ICRC and leaders of national and international non-governmental organizations.

89. The Special Representative undertook field visits to prisons and orphanages in Kigali and Gisenyi; a UNICEF-supported re-education centre at Gitarama for children accused of participating in acts of genocide; genocide sites at the churches of Nyamata and Ntarama; and Ruhengeri, one of the north-eastern provinces affected by the ongoing insurgency. He also visited Gahini, the cradle of the East Africa Revival fellowship, where he met with the local bishop and elders.

90. The situation of children in Rwanda presents an extraordinary challenge. Among the estimated 800,000 people massacred, 300,000 were children. It is estimated that as many as 375,000 children are at present deprived of access to education. Over 84 per cent of children have experienced death in their family; over 52 per cent have lost their mother, while over 62 per cent have lost their father, with over 76 per cent losing their siblings. More than 95 per cent of children have directly witnessed violence, while almost 70 per cent have witnessed someone being killed and 31 per cent have witnessed rape and other forms of sexual violence. It is estimated that 20 per cent

of the overall child population of Rwanda are severely traumatized.

91. During his mission, the Special Representative discussed several issues affecting the children of Rwanda:

(a) *Child-headed households and property rights.*

As a result of the genocide, there are an estimated 45,000 households headed by children, 90 per cent of them by girls. Under Rwandese law, however, girls cannot inherit agricultural land, which is essential for the livelihood of their families. The Special Representative urged the Government to introduce legislation that would allow girls to inherit farms and other properties. Legislation has now been passed and is due to come into force soon;

(b) *Demobilization and age of recruitment.* The Special Representative welcomed the policy announcement by the Government to demobilize all child soldiers and urged the Government to raise the age limit for recruitment from 17 to 18;

(c) *Juvenile justice.* The Special Representative was encouraged by efforts to address the problem of the treatment of juveniles accused of participating in acts of genocide, including the establishment of a special bench for minors, separate wings for minors in prisons and the training of juvenile justice officials. He was concerned, however, that the juvenile judicial process was moving very slowly: only 28 out of a caseload of 5,000 detained minors had gone to trial in the past five years. The Special Representative noted the Government's intention to reinstate *gacaca*, a traditional method of justice, rooted in the local community, in an attempt to speed up the judicial process;

(d) *Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.* The Special Representative encouraged the Government to use the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to submit its report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child;

(e) *Ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.* The Special Representative urged Rwanda to ratify the African Charter.

92. Visiting Rwanda was a particularly difficult experience. The people of Rwanda need time while they seek to cope with the events of genocide and its aftermath. As they grope towards some healing and rebuilding, the people of Rwanda will need much understanding and support from the international community. The Special Representative appeals to the international community to provide strong moral and material support to the

Government and people of Rwanda during this difficult period.

B. Democratic Republic of the Congo

93. During the visit to Rwanda, on 22 February 1999, the Special Representative held a meeting in Gisenyi with Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, then chairman of the principal Congolese insurgency group, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD); Mr. Wamba had travelled to Gisenyi from Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the meeting. The following important commitments emerged from the meeting:

(a) *A humanitarian ceasefire.* The Special Representative expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation of children in conflict zones in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He proposed a temporary cessation of hostilities for the humanitarian purposes of conducting immunization against polio and emergency feeding of malnourished children. The RCD accepted that proposal; the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo made a similar commitment to the Secretary-General. In spite of changes in the leadership of RCD, the new leadership confirmed its adherence to those undertakings. The first round of the polio immunization campaign was conducted by UNICEF and WHO from 13 to 15 August 1999 and covered almost 90 per cent of the country;

(b) *Protection of civilian populations.* The Special Representative expressed grave concern over the growing trend towards the targeting of civilian populations in situations of conflict. In particular, he raised the question of the massacres of civilians at Makobolo, near Uvira, in January 1999, and in August 1998 in Kasika, in the South Kivu region. He emphasized the gravity of those events and urged the RCD to accept the participation of international experts in conducting investigations. The RCD indicated that their own investigations were under way and accepted the participation of international experts to assist in the process;

(c) *Recruitment and demobilization of child soldiers.* The Special Representative expressed particular concern over the continuing recruitment and use of child soldiers in the ongoing armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The RCD acknowledged that it had inherited *kadogos* (kiswahili for "little ones") from the 1996-1997 war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but agreed to cooperate with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations in ensuring

demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. The Special Representative urged the RCD to adopt the age limit of 18 for recruitment and participation in hostilities. The RCD accepted this in principle, but indicated that precise mechanisms and practical arrangements needed to be worked out for the purpose;

(d) *Convention on the Rights of the Child.* The Special Representative emphasized the importance for all parties to conflict, including non-state actors, to respect the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The RCD undertook to observe the Convention;

(e) *Curbing public dissemination of incendiary information.* The Special Representative expressed deep concern over the disturbing trend of using radio, television and public rallies to incite ethnic and racial hatred. He urged the RCD to refrain from employing such practices. The RCD accepted this.

94. The Special Representative has been working closely with United Nations partners, in particular UNICEF and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to ensure that major child protection concerns are reflected in the mandate and staffing of the United Nations peacekeeping mission being deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Two posts for child protection advisers have been included in the first phase of deployment of the mission.

C. Burundi

95. The Special Representative visited Burundi from 24 to 28 February 1999 to assess first-hand the impact of the ongoing war on children and to discuss ways to protect them better in that situation.

96. The Special Representative met with the President of the Republic, Pierre Buyoya; the President of the National Assembly, Leonce Ngendakumana; the First Vice-President, Frederic Bamvuginyumvira; the Second Vice-President, Mathias Sinamenye; the Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation, Séverin Ntahomvukiye; the Minister for Defence, Alfred Nkurunziza; the Minister for Human Rights, Institutional Reforms and Relations with the National Assembly, Eugene Nindorera; with governors of five provinces where children have been most seriously affected by the war; and with the mayor of Bujumbura. He also held meetings with the United Nations country team, representatives of the diplomatic corps, religious leaders, national and

international non-governmental organizations, representatives of ICRC and women's associations.

97. The Special Representative undertook field visits to Ngozi and Muyinga to observe UNHCR repatriation of refugees returning from the United Republic of Tanzania. He also travelled to Ruyigi to visit community projects, including a centre for orphaned children.

98. A number of issues were raised and commitments were obtained during the visit:

(a) *Age of recruitment.* The Government undertook to introduce legislation to raise the minimum age for recruitment from 16 to 18;

(b) *Protection of civilian populations.* The Special Representative expressed deep concern about reported incidents of military attacks on civilians. The Minister for Defence committed himself to prosecuting any reported misconduct within the Burundi armed forces to the full extent of the law;

(c) *Convention on anti-personnel landmines.* The Special Representative urged and the Government undertook to expedite the ratification of the Ottawa Convention;

(d) *Placing the protection and welfare of children on the agenda of the Arusha peace talks.* The Government agreed to the proposal to inscribe the protection and welfare of children in the Arusha peace process. The Special Representative had previously discussed the issue with the facilitator of the Burundi peace negotiations, former President Julius Nyerere of the United Republic of Tanzania, who had given his blessing to the proposal;

(e) *Participation of women in the Arusha process.* At the request of women's groups in Burundi, the Special Representative urged the Government to accept representatives of Burundi women as full participants in the Arusha peace negotiations; President Buyoya accepted the proposal and President Nyerere also supported it;

(f) *Suspension of sanctions.* The Special Representative expressed satisfaction at the recent suspension of regional sanctions against Burundi.

99. The Special Representative found that Burundi seemed to be coming to a reckoning with its past. An improvement in the overall security situation was evident, relative to recent years, although a full-fledged war was still raging. Especially encouraging were strong signs of a commitment among the people to pursue peace and reconciliation. Government officials and ordinary people alike were openly addressing issues that had historically

divided the society, such as power-sharing and mutual security. The Arusha peace process clearly appeared to have passed an important threshold. At the local level, the Special Representative also encountered several examples of bridge-building between the Hutu and Tutsi communities.

100. The Special Representative felt that Burundi seemed to be at a point where it could turn a new page, but would need strong international support to consolidate the current peace process. Burundi remains a classic case of a situation of "imperfect peace", with real progress having been made in the peace process, but with the international community, donors and multilateral institutions alike, not fully meeting the challenge of engaging to consolidate that process. The Special Representative has appealed for increased international assistance for the repatriation and resettlement of displaced populations and for the resuscitation of health and educational facilities in Burundi.

D. Sudan

101. Following his earlier visit in June 1998, the Special Representative undertook a mission to the Sudan from 2 to 9 March 1999, visiting areas under the control both of the Government and of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

102. During his visit, the Special Representative met in Khartoum with senior officials of the Government, including the First Vice-President, Ali Osman Mohamed Taha; the Speaker of the National Assembly, Hassan Abdalla Al Turabi; the Minister for External Relations, Mustafa Osman Ismail; and the Chairman of the Southern States Coordinating Council, Riak Machar. In Nairobi, he met the SPLM Chairman, John Garang. He was received by President Daniel arap Moi and met the Foreign Minister, Bonaya Godana. In the Sudan, he met with the United Nations country team, the diplomatic community, representatives of ICRC, international and local non-governmental organizations, and civil society leaders.

103. The Special Representative travelled to several affected areas where he visited camps for displaced populations, schools and hospitals. In the north-eastern city of Kassala he also met victims of landmines and in the southern city of Juba he witnessed first-hand the plight and resilience of the internally displaced populations in the Kuku and Yei camps. While visiting last year's famine-affected southern province of Bahr-el-Ghazal, the Special Representative was able to assess for himself the improved

humanitarian situation in both the government-controlled town of Wau and the SPLM-held towns of Panthou and Mapel. The Special Representative also had the opportunity to visit the Kakuma refugee camp in north-east Kenya.

104. In his discussions with the Government and the SPLM leadership, a number of issues were raised and several commitments were obtained, including:

(a) *Use of landmines.* The Government and the SPLM gave commitments not to use anti-personnel landmines in the southern conflict zone and to cooperate with the United Nations in establishing mine-awareness programmes and demining activities;

(b) *Placing the protection and welfare of children on the peace agenda.* The Government and the SPLM agreed that the protection and welfare of children should be placed on the agenda of the peace process sponsored by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD);

(c) *Targeting of civilian populations and sites.* The Special Representative expressed grave concern at the military targeting of civilian populations and sites. He told all parties that acts such as the bombing of hospitals and schools, the raiding and burning of villages and abductions were entirely unacceptable;

(d) *Abduction and kidnapping of children in southern Sudan.* The Special Representative raised the serious issue of the abduction of children. Of particular concern was the situation in the railway corridor linking Babanusa in the north and Wau in the south. Reports indicated that militias, known as *muraheleen*, allied with the Government and used to escort trains, were raiding local villages, burning homes, stealing cattle and abducting children, who were then transported to work in homes and in the fields in the north. The Special Representative is pleased that a comprehensive agreement on the Babanusa-Wau rail corridor has now been concluded between the Government and the SPLM;

(e) *Abducted Ugandan children.* The Government affirmed its pledge to help facilitate the release and repatriation of children abducted from northern Uganda by the Ugandan insurgency group, the Lord's Resistance Army;

(f) *Dinka-Nuer peace conference.* The Special Representative welcomed the Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference, held in Wunlit, Bahr-el-Ghazal, from 27 February to 7 March, which had focused on reconciliation and the application of traditional norms. He was pleased that the initiative for the conference had

come from religious leaders, local chief and elders. In that connection, he urged the SPLM leadership to allow and encourage an active role for civil society in areas under their control;

(g) *Access to the Nuba mountains.* The Special Representative urged the Government to honour its commitment to allow a humanitarian assessment mission to visit SPLM-held areas in the Nuba mountains. He is pleased that a United Nations inter-agency humanitarian assessment mission was able to do so in June 1999;

(h) *Diversion of food aid in the south.* In discussions with the SPLM leadership, the Special Representative expressed concern over reports about the diversion of humanitarian relief by local SPLM commanders. He welcomed assurances from the SPLM leadership that new political and military leaders had been appointed at the local levels to ensure that this would not happen;

(i) *Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.* The Special Representative welcomed the Government's announcement during his visit that the report had been completed in Arabic and English;

(j) *Neighbourhood initiative.* The Government and the SPLM gave their support to the proposal for a "neighbourhood initiative" that would bring together a group of eastern African countries linked by cross-border issues affecting children. The "neighbourhood initiative" would address such issues as the movement of displaced populations, the abduction of children, the illicit flow of arms and the use of landmines in border areas.

105. Everywhere in the Sudan, whenever the Special Representative encountered local communities, their message was always clear and simple: "Go tell our leaders and the outside world that we just want peace. And we want education for our children." The Special Representative urges all key international actors to make the Sudanese peace process (IGAD process) a serious and major priority project.

E. Visiting Kosovo refugee children in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania

106. The Special Representative visited the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania from 10 to 13 April 1999 to assess first-hand the impact of the Kosovo crisis on children.

107. In Skopje, the Special Representative held discussions with Vice-Prime Minister, Minister for Labour and Social Policy, Bedredin Ibrahim, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Commander, General Sir Michael Jackson. Briefings were provided by representatives of UNHCR, UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNDP.

108. In Tirana, the Special Representative was received by the President of the Republic of Albania, Rexhep Meidani. He also met with Rexhep Qosja, a signatory to the Rambouillet agreement on behalf of the Kosovo Albanians.

109. The Special Representative undertook several field visits in both countries. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, he visited several refugee centres in the vicinity of Skopje. In Tetovo, he visited host families who had taken in significant numbers of refugees and held discussions with the mayor and the local Red Cross.

110. In Albania, the Special Representative visited refugee sites in and around Tirana. He then travelled to the town of Kukes in the north of Albania, which was the main point of entry and had one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the country.

111. Children were the worst-affected sector of the population in the Kosovo refugee crisis. They were the most traumatized by the violence and had been particularly affected by family separation and interruption of schooling. Children constituted over 65 per cent of those expelled from Kosovo.

112. At the conclusion of his mission, the Special Representative put forward an agenda for action for the children of Kosovo, comprising the following measures:

(a) *Ensuring basic survival needs.* Basic survival needs included food, shelter, sanitary facilities, access to clean water and basic health services, especially immunization. These needs were especially acute in Albania; the situation of the refugee population in the town of Kukes was particularly serious;

(b) *Reunification of separated families.* More than half of the Kosovo refugee population was estimated to have one or more members of the family separated. The capacities of UNICEF and ICRC for tracing needed to be greatly increased and government authorities needed to facilitate the movement of refugees between different localities for purposes of reunification;

(c) *Trauma counselling.* There were signs of severe trauma among the refugee children. It was necessary to mobilize and train quickly a significant number of trauma

counsellors, especially from within the refugee and host communities. In addition, items such as toys, games and balls were among the most essential contributions to help restore a measure of normalcy to children's lives;

(d) *Schooling for refugee children.* There was need to ensure continuity of schooling for the refugee children, an issue that was often overlooked in the midst of an emergency response. He appealed to donors to provide funding to expand the capacities of local schools in host communities;

(e) *Support to host families.* Ordinary families in Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia responded to the refugee crisis with remarkable generosity and solidarity. Over half of the refugees in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania lived with host families. This was an overwhelming burden for families who were already facing serious economic pressures. The situation could not be sustained without major external assistance;

(f) *"Voice of Children".* The Special Representative highlighted the need for television and radio programmes devoted mainly to the needs of refugee children, with a focus on entertainment, learning and peace education. He subsequently lobbied several international networks to participate in such a project;

(g) *Relocation to third countries.* There were ongoing efforts to relocate some of the refugees from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania to third countries. This had to be conducted on an entirely voluntary basis, while at the same time preserving family unity;

(h) *Preventing recruitment and participation of children in hostilities.* There was little evidence of the recruitment and participation of children in the conflict in Kosovo. However, there was need for preventive vigilance in order to ensure that refugee camps and host families did not become recruiting centres for armed groups;

(i) *Protection of young women against sexual exploitation.* There were disturbing reports that young refugee women were increasingly being lured into international trafficking for prostitution. Increased protection measures, including systematic registration and improved educational and economic opportunities for girls, were needed to reduce their vulnerability to such exploitation;

(j) *Access to children remaining in Kosovo.* The Special Representative was deeply preoccupied by the situation of children who had remained in Kosovo and

whose fate was unknown. The international community needed to insist on access to that population, which remained isolated from the outside world.

113. Upon his return, the Special Representative briefed the Commission on Human Rights on his findings, consulted with UNHCR and with UNICEF and briefed non-governmental organizations in Geneva and in New York.

114. The Special Representative is pleased with the wonderful response of the international community to the situation of Kosovo children. He also wishes to pay tribute to the remarkable generosity and solidarity demonstrated by ordinary host families in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania.

115. Since his visit, the Special Representative has maintained close consultations with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General for the Balkans and United Nations agencies, in particular UNHCR and UNICEF.

116. The agenda for action for the children of Kosovo is evolving in the context of the process of return, resettlement and reconstruction in Kosovo. The following issues are emerging as some of the main challenges facing Kosovo children today:

(a) *Child protection and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.* In keeping with his advocacy of a general policy to make child protection and welfare an explicit priority in the mandate of every United Nations peace operation and to provide for a child protection advocate to be attached to each operation, the Special Representative is discussing with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNMIK ways of incorporating those elements fully into UNMIK;

(b) *Education.* A particular challenge is the re-establishment of educational institutions, the development of curricula suitable for the different ethnic groups and the organization of mixed classes;

(c) *Reconciliation.* The intensity of the hate engendered by the recent conflict has left deep scars in the minds of children. Reconciliation has to start with children. Projects must be encouraged to address this;

(d) *Trauma counselling.* The severe traumatization of children will need sustained attention for a long time;

(e) *Landmines and unexploded ordnance.* Landmines and unexploded ordnance present a significant problem, especially for children and farmers;

(f) *“Voice of Children” project.* Television and radio programming devoted mainly to children is much needed, to serve educational and recreational needs as well as to provide significant support for efforts at reconciliation;

(g) *Neighbourhood initiative.* The neighbourhood of Kosovo is among the three subregions of the world that have been identified by the office of the Special Representative for the development of a neighbourhood initiative, focusing on cross-border issues affecting children. In that connection, the office of the Special Representative participated in a regional workshop on child-related issues, organized by UNHCR in Belgrade in February 1999, and in an inter-agency mission to Montenegro. A main objective for both the workshop and the mission was to assess and identify major cross-border issues that could form the basis of a neighbourhood initiative for Kosovo. The following issues were identified: education, reconciliation, movement of children across borders, sexual exploitation of children and adolescents across borders and small arms proliferation.

F. Mozambique

117. On the occasion of a conference in Maputo, the Special Representative visited Mozambique from 18 to 22 April 1999 to assess the situation of children in the aftermath of the protracted armed conflict, which ended in 1992.

118. During his visit to Mozambique, the Special Representative was received by the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Joaquim Alberto Chissano, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Leonardo Santos Simão. The Special Representative met with Afonso Dhlakama, President of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) and the opposition leader, and with Graça Machel. He also met with the United Nations country team and local and international non-governmental organizations.

119. The Special Representative visited a UNDP-supported demining project and a local child welfare data-gathering project in Magude. He also visited a prosthesis and orthosis rehabilitation support project at the Maputo Central Hospital.

120. The Special Representative was impressed by Mozambique as a “success story”. Several aspects of Mozambique’s success should augur well for children: the process of national reconciliation; the building of a genuine

multi-party democratic practice; a strong sense of national cohesion; and an impressive rate of economic growth in recent years.

121. Although the children of Mozambique seemed to have adjusted relatively well, the Special Representative noted several important lessons to be learned from the Mozambican experience:

(a) *Including the protection and welfare of children on peace agendas.* Children’s protection and welfare were not on the peace agenda in Mozambique and, as a result, no special framework or arrangements were made for their benefit and protection in the post-conflict phase. For example, exceedingly few children were formally included in the demobilization and reintegration process;

(b) *Post-conflict arrangements and resource allocation.* The Mozambique experience underscores the importance of a national body to ensure that the rights and welfare of children will be a central concern in the aftermath of conflict and that this will be reflected in national priority-setting, policy-making and resource allocation. In the case of Mozambique, this was left to weakened national institutions, which lacked the resources and the capacity to respond effectively to this overwhelming challenge;

(c) *The challenge of demining.* Like many countries emerging from periods of protracted conflict, Mozambique still suffers from the enormous problems caused by the indiscriminate use of mines. Mozambique has embarked on a serious programme of demining, but present technology is utterly inadequate for the task. One deminer can clear only approximately 50 square metres per day. More and urgent support must be given to current efforts to develop more efficient technology;

(d) *Lack of countrywide access.* Often in the aftermath of conflict there is a problem of access to many parts of a country. It is important for United Nations agencies, bilateral agencies and the international and local non-governmental organizations to break through that barrier and to seek to service war-affected populations throughout the country;

(e) *“Lessons learned” and “best practices”.* The Special Representative noted that very little had been recorded on the course and impact of interventions aimed at children in the aftermath of the war. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations should make it a point to monitor and evaluate the impact of international and local interventions on behalf of children,

in order to facilitate the learning of lessons for the affected country and others facing similar situations.

G. Colombia

122. The Special Representative visited Colombia from 30 May to 6 June 1999 to assess first-hand the impact of the conflict on children.

123. During his visit the Special Representative was received by the President of the Republic of Colombia, Andrés Pastrana Arango, the Vice-President, Gustavo Bell Lemus, the High Commissioner for Peace, Victor G. Ricardo, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Fernando Tapias Stahelin, and other senior officials. He met Raul Reyes, the spokesman for the largest guerrilla movement, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), in the demilitarized zone in the south of the country. He also held discussions with the United Nations country team, international and local non-governmental organizations, the Catholic Church, the business community, the diplomatic community, representatives of ICRC and civil society leaders.

124. The Special Representative travelled to Apartado, Turbo and the “peace community” of San José de Apartado (Uraba region), Medellín (Antioquia), Quibdó (Choco) and San Vicente del Caguán in the demilitarized zone. He also visited Soacha, a marginalized community south of Bogotá that is home to some 50,000 displaced persons.

125. For over 40 years, Colombian children have suffered as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence. Large numbers of children participate as child soldiers in armed groups and forces. Children comprise the majority of the 1.2 million persons who have been forcibly displaced within Colombia over the past 10 years. Displaced communities lack access to basic rights and services such as schooling, health, water and sanitary living conditions. Colombia’s chronic violence has given rise to alarming rates of child prostitution, gang warfare, domestic violence, child abuse and increasing numbers of street children who are often victims of “social cleansing”. This culture of violence has produced a widespread sense of fear, impunity and resignation within Colombian society.

126. The following were the key issues raised and commitments made during his visit:

(a) *Discussions with the Government.* During discussions with the Special Representative, the Government announced a new policy not to enlist young persons below the age of 18 in the armed forces. President

Pastrana also indicated that the Government was exploring ways of expediting ratification of the Ottawa Convention. In that context, the Special Representative urged all parties to refrain from the use of landmines. He implored the Government to address the urgent needs of displaced communities, especially concerning health, education, sanitary conditions, shelter, water, registration and economic opportunities. The Government should also ensure their physical protection and secure the conditions for their return or resettlement. He urged the Government to address the issue of impunity;

(b) *Discussion with the FARC.* The Special Representative met with Comandante Raul Reyes, spokesman for the FARC, in the demilitarized zone near San Vicente. The meeting was arranged and attended by the High Commissioner for Peace, Victor G. Ricardo. The Special Representative urged the FARC to observe humanitarian principles and norms in the conduct of war. He stressed in particular the importance and urgency of achieving a political settlement of the protracted conflict. The FARC agreed to end recruitment of children below the age of 15 and expressed its openness to explore with the United Nations and relevant non-governmental organizations a process and a framework for the eventual demobilization and rehabilitation of young persons currently within their ranks. The Special Representative announced the formation of a tripartite task force, comprising the Government, the United Nations and the FARC, that will address urgent humanitarian needs in the demilitarized zones, with a special focus on the needs of children and women;

(c) *Protection of civilian populations in the midst of conflict.* The Special Representative expressed the deep preoccupation of the international community with the protection of civilian populations in the midst of armed conflict, insisting that all parties in the Colombian civil war observe humanitarian principles and norms. In particular, he stressed the protection and rights of the most vulnerable sectors of the population — children, displaced populations and women. He called for greater protection for humanitarian workers;

(d) *Kidnapping and hostage-taking.* The Special Representative strongly condemned kidnapping and hostage-taking as a means of conducting political struggles. He declared that kidnapping was entirely unacceptable to the international community: it traumatized families, terrorized communities, stigmatized the abductors and hurt their causes;

(e) *Situation of internally displaced communities.* Colombia has one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons, predominantly children and women. Displaced communities live in particularly precarious conditions, without access to basic facilities such as water, electricity, sanitation or medical services. Apart from improvised classes, children often have no access to regular schooling. The Special Representative urged the Government and United Nations agencies to make the protection and assistance of displaced persons an urgent priority;

(f) *Placing children's protection and welfare on the peace agenda.* The Special Representative was pleased that both the Government and the FARC had agreed to place the needs and protection of children as a high priority in the peace process and its outcome;

(g) *"Voice of Children" project.* The Special Representative proposed the establishment of a radio station or programme devoted mainly to the needs of children. This would serve to give voice to children's concerns, offer education and entertainment, and promote tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution;

(h) *Coalition on the protection of Colombian children.* At the close of his visit, the Special Representative launched a broad coalition comprising members of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations, representatives of civil society and other key actors to coordinate and raise the profile of efforts to address the needs of children affected by the war in Colombia.

127. The Special Representative felt a strong yearning for peace and social justice among all sectors of Colombian society, but it is clear that only in conditions of peace can the Colombian people address the fundamental issues of social justice and inclusion and end the massive suffering of civilian populations, especially children and women.

H. Sierra Leone

128. The Special Representative undertook a mission to Sierra Leone — his third visit there — and Guinea from 30 August to 4 September 1999. The visit had the following objectives: to assess first-hand the conditions of children in Sierra Leone following the ending of the war and the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement (S/1999/777, annex); to review progress made in carrying out commitments made during the previous visit in May 1998; to assess the situation of Sierra Leonean refugee children

in Guinea; and to identify key measures and initiatives needed to ensure the protection, rights and welfare of children in the aftermath of the war in Sierra Leone.

129. In Sierra Leone, the Special Representative was received by the President of the Republic, Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabbah; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sama Banya; the Minister for Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Shirley Gbujama; the Deputy Defence Minister and Coordinator of Civil Defence Forces, Hinga Norman; the Chief of the Defence Staff, Maxwell Khobe; the Force Commander of the Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Gabriel Kpamber; and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) advance team led by Solomon Rogers. He held discussions with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone, Francis Okelo, the United Nations country team, representatives of ICRC, local and international non-governmental organizations and a cross-section of civil society leaders. In Guinea, he was received by the Prime Minister, Lamine Sidimé, and the Minister for Social Welfare for Protection of Women and Children, Mariama Aribot.

130. In Sierra Leone, the Special Representative visited war-affected populations in the vicinity of Freetown and the region of Bo. The visits in Freetown included a camp for internally displaced persons at the National Workshop; a foster care centre for street children; the National Stadium, where displaced communities are provided temporary shelter; the Murray Town Camp for amputees; and the Family Home Care Centre for former child combatants in Lakka. In Bo, he visited a vocational training centre for former child soldiers and a major camp for internally displaced persons. He also met with the Kamajor leadership in the region and with a group of Kamajor child combatants. In Guinea, the Special Representative visited the Massakoundou refugee camp for Sierra Leoneans in Kissidougou prefecture and met with refugee children.

131. The children of Sierra Leone have suffered beyond belief in the eight-year war. Many children have been deliberately maimed, with their limbs brutally cut off. In the month of January 1999 alone, over 4,000 children were abducted during the incursion of the RUF and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) into Freetown. It is estimated that 60 per cent of abducted children are girls, the vast majority of whom are reported to have been sexually abused. More than 10,000 children have been serving as child soldiers in the three main fighting groups, the RUF, the AFRC and the Civil Defence Forces. Over 3

million Sierra Leoneans — two thirds of the total population — have been displaced by war within and outside their country, more than 60 per cent of them children. There are more than 3,000 street children in Freetown alone. Many children are suffering from serious psychosocial trauma.

132. In view of what the Special Representative witnessed on the ground in Sierra Leone and drawing on previous commitments made to him during his visit in May 1998, he has put forward a special agenda for action for the children of Sierra Leone. The 15-point agenda contains measures and initiatives aimed at ensuring the rehabilitation and welfare of children in Sierra Leone in the aftermath of the war. The measures are as follows:

(a) *National commission for children of Sierra Leone.* There is an urgent need to establish a national commission for children to ensure that the protection and welfare of children will be a central concern in the aftermath of the war and that this will be reflected in national priority-setting, policy-making and resource allocation. This proposal has been welcomed by the Government as well as by civil society organizations and leaders;

(b) *Child protection and the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone.* As a general policy, the Special Representative has proposed that child protection and welfare should be an explicit priority in the mandate of every United Nations peace operation and that a senior child protection advocate should be attached to such operations to promote the implementation of that component of the mandate. These two new elements have now been incorporated into the mandate and staffing of the expanded United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL);

(c) *Rehabilitation of amputees.* A whole new community of persons has suddenly emerged in Sierra Leone, persons without limbs, as a result of a diabolical practice of brutally cutting off the hands and legs of victims. This is a completely new phenomenon, one to which the community has no ready response. A special programme is needed for this category of victims, to provide trauma counselling, physical therapy and technical as well as material support;

(d) *Sexually abused children.* The extensive and systematic sexual abuse visited upon young girls is one of the most painful and traumatic legacies of the war in Sierra Leone. The victims' trauma is compounded by social stigma and reticence to address the issue. A special programme is needed to address the special needs of this

group of victims, including their health needs; such a programme should also include a campaign of sensitization of local communities;

(e) *Access to and release of abducted children.* A large number of children were abducted during the war, most of whom still remain behind rebel lines; gaining access to them and obtaining their release is a most pressing concern. The Special Representative demanded that the RUF leadership agree to and facilitate the necessary security arrangements for a humanitarian team to visit the zones under their control. The RUF leadership has agreed to this and discussions are under way to send a team led by UNOMSIL and UNICEF;

(f) *Demobilization of child combatants.* The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child combatants needs special attention. When the Special Representative visited Sierra Leone in May 1998, a joint task force for the demobilization of child combatants was constituted for that purpose, comprising UNOMSIL, UNICEF, ECOMOG and Civil Defence Forces (and now RUF) representatives. With the end of the war, there is an urgent need for the group to take charge of an effective process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration for child ex-combatants. The work of the joint task force feeds directly into the overall programme and activities of the National Committee for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration;

(g) *Recruitment and use of children.* During the Special Representative's visit to Sierra Leone in May 1998, the Government and the Civil Defence Forces made a commitment not to recruit children under the age of 18; they have reiterated that commitment ever since and, indeed, this has now been incorporated in the Lomé Peace Agreement and the Human Rights Manifesto. The same commitment has now been made by the RUF leadership. The Special Representative calls on all the parties to abide by that commitment;

(h) *Displaced children.* More than 3 million persons have been displaced by the war in Sierra Leone, over 60 per cent of them children. More resources are needed to increase the capacity of relief agencies and non-governmental organizations to respond to the needs of some 2.5 million people displaced within the country who live in difficult conditions, with overcrowded shelters and inadequate relief provisions. Guinea has assumed a heavy burden on behalf of the international community to host nearly half a million refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia. The donor community needs to provide more support to Guinea as a host country and to UNHCR to

enable them to shoulder that responsibility more effectively;

(i) *Rehabilitation of basic educational and medical services.* Basic social facilities and services were largely destroyed during the years of war. The rehabilitation of services that benefit children, especially educational and medical facilities, in particular in rural areas, should constitute a clear priority in the post-conflict recovery programme;

(j) *Reinforcing traditional norms.* The conduct of the war, in particular the horrific atrocities, has radically undermined local value systems within Sierra Leonean society — values that traditionally have provided for the protection of civilian populations, especially children and women. All necessary support should be extended to local community leaders and non-governmental organizations who are working to revive and reinforce those values;

(k) *Neighbourhood initiative.* The zone comprising Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea has been selected as the first subregion for the development of a “neighbourhood initiative”. Cross-border threats affecting children in the neighbourhood include such issues as small arms flows, refugee movements, cross-border recruitment of children and family tracing and reunification. An inter-agency mission will soon visit the subregion to assess and propose concrete initiatives for that purpose;

(l) *“Voice of Children” project for Sierra Leone.* The establishment of a “Voice of Children” radio for the children of Sierra Leone in the aftermath of the conflict has been proposed. Such a project should provide children with much-needed information, recreation and entertainment, offer educational programmes and promote reconciliation;

(m) *Parliamentary caucus for children.* This caucus was constituted on the occasion of the Special Representative’s previous visit to Sierra Leone. It has become an effective advocacy group on behalf of children in and outside parliament. The caucus needs support to strengthen and expand its activities;

(n) *Providing training for the new national army.* The Government and the Chief of the Defence Staff have reiterated the commitment they made during the Special Representative’s visit in 1998 to accept assistance from United Nations agencies and relevant non-governmental organizations for training on humanitarian and human rights standards. That programme will now be organized and led by UNOMSIL and UNICEF;

(o) *Special fund for war victims.* Under the Lomé Peace Agreement, the parties made a commitment to set

up a special fund for war victims. There is an urgent need for the early establishment of the fund; in that context, particular priority should be given to the special needs of amputees, sexually abused children and women, and seriously traumatized children.

133. In order to translate this agenda into action, serious commitment and concerted efforts on the part of national and international actors will be required.

134. The particular fate of children is being played out in a broader context of war and peace in Sierra Leone. The following are some of the Special Representative’s observations concerning that broader context:

(a) *Two preoccupations.* Sierra Leoneans are preoccupied by two overwhelming concerns. Firstly, the need to establish confidence in the peace process. It is crucial that the key political leaders demonstrate their commitment to the Lomé Peace Agreement by taking bold steps towards its implementation. Secondly, a credible level of security needs to be re-established in the country. Above all, this means disarmament: Sierra Leoneans believe that without disarmament, they remain highly vulnerable, as the armed groups might reverse the little progress so far made;

(b) *The “crisis of young people”.* Apart from the imperative of re-establishing credible security and peace, the “crisis of young people” is the most important challenge facing Sierra Leonean society today;

(c) *Comparison with Kosovo.* Sierra Leoneans, at all levels, are remarkably well informed about Kosovo. Everywhere the Special Representative went, he was challenged to explain perceived discrepancies in the attitude and the response of the international community with regard to the needs of children in the two situations;

(d) *Atrocities against Sierra Leoneans.* The diabolical atrocities committed in Sierra Leone were not the result of mass violence or inter-communal upheavals along ethnic or religious lines. Rather, it was the work of a small segment of the population, well armed, deeply alienated and bitter, unleashing organized and indiscriminate terror on the rest of society;

(e) *Sierra Leone’s hidden strong points.* In spite of the nightmare that the country has gone through, Sierra Leone has several hidden strong points, which have survived the war. Among them are an elected Government that enjoys widespread legitimacy within the population; a strong and active civil society; a fabric of national cohesion, without significant polarization along ethnic or religious lines; and a strong tradition of higher education.

Of course, none of these strong points can “kick in” without the prerequisites of peace and security being put in place;

(f) *Guinea’s support for refugees.* Guinea has assumed a major responsibility for refugees; currently it hosts more than half a million people from Sierra Leone and Liberia who are officially registered with UNHCR, in addition to a significant number of unregistered persons who have also fled from the neighbouring countries. The refugee population in Guinea now constitutes more than 10 per cent of its own population, putting serious strains on social services and the environment. The country deserves more recognition and support for its role and solidarity, and UNHCR needs more resources to provide adequately for the refugees in Guinea.

135. At the conclusion of his mission, the Special Representative made the following appeals on behalf of the children of Sierra Leone. He appealed to the political leaders to demonstrate their commitment to peace by taking bold and concrete measures to implement the Lomé Peace Agreement. He urged the leadership of the RUF and the AFRC to talk frankly with the children of Sierra Leone and acknowledge fully their role in the horrific atrocities committed during the war, most of them directed against children and women. Finally, he appealed to the international community not to let down the children of Sierra Leone by again adopting a “wait-and-see” attitude; the Lomé Agreement is a fragile peace that requires much local and international support for its implementation and consolidation.

VI. Building a framework of collaboration within the United Nations system

A. Economic and Social Council

136. The office of the Special Representative collaborated closely with UNICEF to ensure that the report to the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council reflected the concerns of children affected by armed conflict. Specifically, the report addressed the issue of insufficient inter-agency coordination in relation to children’s issues, both in the field and at Headquarters. The report stressed the need to include children’s concerns at an early stage in peace processes to ensure adequate attention and resources throughout the relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development processes.

It stated clearly that children must be ensured access to education, health and other services throughout all phases of conflict. The report also underlined the importance of applying a multifaceted approach to preventing the use of children as soldiers. Those concerns were included in the agreed conclusions adopted by the Economic and Social Council.

137. At the invitation of the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Special Representative addressed the session on the occasion commemorating the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which took place during the high-level segment in July 1999.

B. Consultative mechanisms at Headquarters

138. The Special Representative works through the executive and consultative mechanisms to promote the cause of children affected by armed conflict within the mainstream of United Nations activities. In that connection, his membership and participation in the Senior Management Group chaired by the Secretary-General, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Group has been very useful for promoting that agenda.

C. Operational agencies and bodies

139. The Special Representative serves as a facilitator and a resource for the agencies and bodies that operate on the ground. The main responsibility for developing operational programmes for promoting the protection and welfare of children rests with the operational agencies and bodies that have the resources, the expertise and field presence. The activities of the Special Representative complement those of such bodies through public advocacy as well as political and diplomatic initiatives to achieve humanitarian objectives. In effect, the role of the Special Representative is that of a catalyst and advocate, highlighting the agenda to promote the rights, protection and welfare of children and fostering concerted action on it within the United Nations system.

140. The Special Representative convenes an informal advisory group in support of his work, comprising representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP, WFP, WHO and the Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs. During the past year, the informal advisory group has continued to meet each month with the Special Representative. Its task is to discuss initiatives and strategies, as well as to advise on coordination of action among those key partners. The advisory group has proved particularly useful in ensuring the success of country visits by the Special Representative.

141. The advisory group was also active in discussing the Special Representative's work plan for 1999 and assigning ad hoc inter-agency task forces to follow up on the main proposals: post-conflict response; neighbourhood initiatives; building local capacities for advocacy; assessing the impact of sanctions on children; incorporating standards and training into United Nations peace operations; and follow-up with the Security Council.

D. Committee on the Rights of the Child

142. In January 1999, the Special Representative addressed the Committee on the Rights of the Child. He recommended that during its field visits in the course of the regular reporting procedure the Committee raise issues such as the recruitment of children, internally displaced children, access to vulnerable populations and the deliberate targeting of children and women. He calls on all States to support and cooperate fully with the Committee.

VII. Follow-up activities

143. The Special Representative's approach to follow-up is based on close cooperation and interaction with key actors, the United Nations system, concerned Governments and local and international non-governmental organizations. Generally, such follow-up falls into two main categories: follow-up to country visits to link initiatives with the programme activities of operational agencies and follow-up on humanitarian commitments made to the Special Representative by parties to conflict.

A. Follow-up to country visits

144. The Special Representative's follow-up to country visits involves several partners at both the Headquarters and field levels:

(a) *Advance planning with United Nations partners.* In advance of field visits, the Special Representative invites proposals and input from all

relevant United Nations partners. Upon completion of a country visit, the Special Representative works closely with the operational agencies at Headquarters and in the field on follow-up activities;

(b) *Direct cooperation with United Nations country teams.* The Special Representative consults with the United Nations country team on follow-up activities before, during and after his field visits. At the end of every visit, the Special Representative and the country team review the outcome of the visit to determine appropriate follow-up. The country team is the principal partner and implementor of the country-specific follow-up. The roles of UNICEF, UNHCR and the resident coordinator are crucial in that respect;

(c) *Governments of affected countries.* A key partner in ensuring effective follow-up to a country visit is the Government of the country. The Special Representative maintains contacts with the relevant Governments through their permanent missions as well as through the United Nations country team;

(d) *Briefing to executive committees at Headquarters.* An important part of the follow-up to country visits is the Special Representative's briefing to relevant executive committees at Headquarters, notably the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security;

(e) *Seeking support of the donor community.* Follow-up measures designed by the Special Representative in cooperation with United Nations agency headquarters and the United Nations country team require the support of donors for implementation. The Special Representative seeks the support of interested donors for specific country projects to be executed by various operational agencies;

(f) *Involving non-governmental organizations.* The Special Representative actively seeks the input of relevant international and local non-governmental organizations in shaping the agenda for his country visits and of follow-up to his initiatives. He meets regularly with non-governmental organizations during country visits and after the visits and briefs organizations in New York and Geneva.

145. The Special Representative has recently proposed a programme of action for country-specific follow-up to ensure progressive implementation of the commitments elicited during his field visits. This is intended to bring together all the key actors in particular country situations to identify and develop a greater coherence of approach. This initiative will encourage the design, development and

funding of new programmes when necessary and should ensure lessons learned from ongoing efforts to protect children. Countries of focus in the first phase of that undertaking will include Burundi, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and the Sudan.

146. The programme of action is being designed collectively and will be executed by a partnership of United Nations agencies, donor countries and non-governmental organizations. Amongst donor countries, a lead role is being played by the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The success of that effort to ensure a concerted response to the needs of war-affected children in particular countries will clearly depend on strong collaboration with United Nations teams in the field and international and local non-governmental organizations, as well as the sustained commitment of donor countries.

B. Follow-up to commitments by parties to conflict

147. The Special Representative has obtained commitments from parties to conflict, Governments and insurgency groups alike, to take certain measures to ensure the protection of children. In addition to staying in direct contact with parties to conflict, the Special Representative also encourages key actors to use their own channels of influence and communication to reinforce the message to parties to conflict that the goodwill and acceptance they seek from the international community will depend significantly on the extent to which they abide by their commitments to protect children and women. For this, the Special Representative relies on key actors, including Governments, the Security Council, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations.

VIII. Reaching out to communities of faith

148. The Special Representative believes that communities of faith, all faiths, have a crucial role to play in the protection of children through their advocacy and work on the ground. He invites their spiritual leaders and institutions to use their moral influence, leadership and their presence within communities to promote the protection of children and women.

149. The Special Representative has developed an active dialogue and framework of cooperation with the World Council of Churches (WCC), a fellowship of over 300 churches active in more than 120 countries. In August 1999, the Special Representative addressed the Central Committee, the Council's principal governing and policy-making body. The Central Committee adopted a resolution in which it welcomed and expressed strong support for the mandate and work of the Special Representative and for Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) on "Children and armed conflict"; it called on its worldwide network of member churches and church-related institutions to undertake and to support concrete initiatives for the protection of children affected by armed conflict; it resolved to incorporate that issue as a significant part of the programme and activities for the Council's Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010). Earlier, the Council's 1998 Harare Declaration called upon member churches to work to prevent the use of children in armed conflict.

150. The Special Representative welcomes the strong support expressed by the Vatican for his agenda and the engagement of the Catholic Church in communities affected by conflict. He is keen to deepen that engagement through the Church's advocacy outreach as well as its worldwide network of humanitarian institutions.

151. The Special Representative has held consultations with the Secretary-General of OIC; they are exploring several possibilities for future engagement and collaboration.

152. During his country visits, the Special Representative has sought to meet and establish dialogue with religious leaders. In his visits to Sierra Leone he met with the Inter-Religious Council; in Colombia, he met with the bishops of Apartado and Libano, with members of the Parochial Commission for Human Rights and with the President of the Episcopal Conference; in Burundi, Rwanda and the Sudan he met with local religious leaders; and in Sri Lanka in 1998 he met with leaders of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim faiths.

153. The Special Representative plans to extend those contacts to reach all major communities of faith.

IX. Building partnerships with non-governmental organizations

154. The Special Representative believes that non-governmental and other civil society organizations have

an indispensable role in shaping the agenda for children affected by armed conflict. Their contribution is critical in many areas. He has called on them to develop activities in three areas in particular: building a movement of advocacy at both the national and international levels; developing concerted operational programmes on the ground to respond more effectively to the needs of victimized children; and serving as an important source of information on particular situations and issues.

155. In advance of his field missions, the Special Representative seeks the input of non-governmental organizations and briefs them upon his return. He meets with local and international non-governmental organizations in the countries he visits to get their perspectives and learn about their projects.

156. The Special Representative has been fostering mutually supportive relationships with several coalitions whose advocacy and service provision directly benefit children affected by armed conflict. Notable among such groups is the International Save the Children Alliance, whose members the Special Representative addressed at their annual meeting in Romania in May 1999. He proposed an agenda of collaboration on issues of advocacy as well as concrete initiatives.

157. Among the larger coalitions of non-governmental organizations with whom the Special Representative has sought to build strong collaboration are the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, with whom he has met in Geneva; InterAction: American Council for Voluntary International Action, whose joint forum with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs regularly hosts the Special Representative; the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, whom the Special Representative has addressed several times; the Leadership Council on Children in Armed Conflict, with whom he collaborates and has co-sponsored an exhibit of drawings and photos of children in conflict-affected countries; the Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the European Union; the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, whom the Special Representative has addressed in Geneva; the UNICEF NGO Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict in New York and the Geneva-based UNICEF NGO Sub-Group on Refugee Children and Children in Armed Conflict, with whom he has held regular briefings and consultations; and a broad coalition of European Union-based operational and advocacy non-governmental organizations with whom he consults when in Brussels. In addition, the Special Representative has conducted bilateral consultations with the International Rescue Committee, the Women's

Commission for Refugee Women and Children, CARE, World Vision and Oxfam.

158. Over the past year the Special Representative has worked closely with the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. He has held consultations with the Coalition's Steering Committee; he delivered a keynote address at a Coalition-sponsored conference at the European Parliament in December 1998 and at the Coalition's Africa Regional Conference in Mozambique in April 1999.

159. The Special Representative strongly supports the campaigns of the International Action Network on Small Arms and the Coalition for an International Criminal Court. In May 1999, the Special Representative addressed the Coalition's official launch of the global campaign to ratify the Rome Statute. The Special Representative participated in the preparatory meeting of the International Action Network on Small Arms, a coalition of some 200 non-governmental organizations working to stem the flow of small arms, in Brussels in October 1998 and he spoke at the official launch of the Network at The Hague in May 1999.

160. The Special Representative has developed excellent collaboration with UNICEF national committees in several countries.

X. Public outreach and the media

161. The Special Representative takes every opportunity to engage and inform the media. He makes a particular effort to engage international and national media in connection with his visits to war-affected countries and regions.

162. In the past year, several major media initiatives have been undertaken by the office of the Special Representative in collaboration with key international broadcasting networks such as the BBC World Service, Radio France Internationale, the Australian Broadcasting Company, the Voice of America, NHK Japan and ZDF German Television. Examples include collaboration on two documentary projects on the issue of child soldiers; two BBC World Service series entitled "Children of Conflict" and a "World of Children"; and a BBC radio documentary "Children in Arms" profiling the work of the Special Representative. In addition, the Special Representative has participated in a number of radio and television programmes on both national and international networks.

163. The Web site of the office of the Special Representative (<http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/>),

accessible through the United Nations home page, became operational in March 1999.

XI. Recommendations

164. On the basis of his activities and experience over the reporting period, the Special Representative is making the following observations and recommendations to generate reflection and discussion, and to serve as a basis for ongoing dialogue with Governments, partners within the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors.

A. Launching an “era of application” for international norms

165. The Special Representative believes that the time has come for the international community to redirect its attention and energies from the juridical task of the development of norms to the political project of ensuring their application and respect on the ground. An “era of application” must be launched. Words on paper cannot save children and women in peril. Such a project can be accomplished if the international community is prepared to employ its considerable collective influence to that end.

B. Promoting and strengthening local value systems

166. A most damaging loss a society can suffer is the collapse of its own value system. Tragically, under pressure of prolonged conflicts, many societies have seen their community values radically undermined, if not shattered altogether. The Special Representative believes that we must mobilize all our resources and social networks, especially parents, extended family, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions, to reassert the injunctions and taboos that have traditionally provided for the protection of children within our societies.

C. Reinforcing commitments made by parties to conflict

167. Several parties to conflict have made commitments to the Special Representative to undertake specific measures for the protection of children. It is critical that

key national and international actors, Governments, the Security Council, regional organizations, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations reinforce those commitments through their own channels of communication and influence.

D. Deepening the engagement of the Security Council

168. Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) on “Children and armed conflict” constitutes a major landmark for the protection of children. The Special Representative calls on all who are concerned for the protection of children to make full use of the resolution as an important tool for advocacy and calls on the Security Council itself to apply the measures set out in the resolution in its future consideration of specific crisis situations and in mandating peace operations.

E. Political support from Governments

169. The Special Representative calls on Governments to make the protection of children a prominent feature of their domestic and international policy agenda. At the international level, he urges them to apply their influence and concerted pressure on those who are abusing and brutalizing children in situations of conflict.

F. An appeal to the business community

170. There is an urgent need to monitor and control the flow of arms into and the exploitation of natural resources (diamonds, gold, timber, etc.) in theatres of conflict, where it is clear that children and women are being systematically brutalized. The Special Representative calls on the international business community to assume its social and corporate responsibility in that context and to refrain from doing business that fuels war machines in such situations. As a start, he urges them to develop voluntary codes of conduct within their own industries to address this serious issue.

G. Placing the protection and welfare of children on peace agendas

171. Children suffer disproportionately in times of war; they have the highest stake in peace. The Special

Representative has proposed that the protection and welfare of children should become an important issue in any negotiations to end war and in peace accords.

H. Making the protection and welfare of children a central concern in post-conflict programmes

172. For many countries, a most daunting challenge in the aftermath of conflict is how to respond to the “crisis of young people”. The protection and welfare of children, both the very young and adolescents, must constitute a central concern in policy-making, priority-setting and resource allocation in the period of post-conflict healing and rebuilding.

I. Integrating child protection into United Nations peace operations

173. As a general policy, the Special Representative has proposed that child protection and welfare should become an explicit priority in the mandate of every United Nations peace operation, that a senior child protection advocate should be attached to such operations to ensure the implementation of that component of the mandate and that appropriate training on the rights and protection of children and women be provided for peacekeepers.

J. Providing for children in periods of “imperfect peace”

174. Child protection must not await the attainment of a firm peace. Even during periods of “imperfect peace”, opportunities and space often exist for providing for the long-term needs of children with regard to health, education, resettlement and rehabilitation. Meeting those needs, however, will require adjustment in the prevailing policy of development assistance. The Special Representative calls on the donor community to review the issue.

K. Providing protection and relief for internally displaced communities

175. During his visits to countries affected by conflict, the Special Representative has encountered first-hand the

massive and growing phenomenon of internal displacement and the deeply distressing conditions of internally displaced persons. The Special Representative believes that the time has come for the international community to develop a more systematic response and framework for providing protection and practical support to internally displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are children and women.

L. Signing and ratifying new international instruments

176. The Special Representative calls on States to sign and ratify the following international instruments, which provide for the protection of children in the context of armed conflict: the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the ILO Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. He also calls on African States to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

M. Concluding work on the optional protocol

177. The Special Representative calls on all States to cooperate actively in current efforts to bring to a successful conclusion, by the beginning of 2000, the work on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on involvement of children in armed conflict. The completion of that project will enable the international community to concentrate its attention and action on the urgent task of curbing child soldiering on the ground.

N. Protecting children from the impact of sanctions

178. The Special Representative calls on the Security Council, whenever it adopts measures under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, to give careful consideration to their impact on children and to provide appropriate humanitarian exemptions.

O. Building local capacities for protection and advocacy

179. The Special Representative believes that much more needs to be done to translate into reality the common objective of building local capacity, local ownership and partnership on the ground. He calls on the donor community, multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organizations to provide more support to strengthen the capacities of national institutions, local non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations.

¹ E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, annex.

P. Preventing conflict at source

180. It is clear that, ultimately, the best way to protect children is to prevent conflicts before they occur or to resolve them before they assume destructive proportions. In order to prevent the occurrence and recurrence of conflict, therefore, both national and international actors have a responsibility to take political, economic and social measures to address certain fundamental issues within societies, including structural imbalance and exclusion, poverty and despair, manipulation of diversity and prolonged denial of democratic governance, all of which contribute significantly to creating conflicts.

Q. Demonstrating equal concern for the plight of all children affected by armed conflict

181. Millions of children are currently suffering from the horrendous impact of armed conflict in different parts of the world. In order to maintain credibility and solidarity, it is critical for the international community to be seen to be responding with the same level of concern wherever children are in need of protection and support.

R. “Go women, go children, go local”

182. During his visits to countries affected by conflict, the Special Representative has been very moved by the examples of ordinary people — mostly women — doing extraordinary things at the local, community level. The international community needs to get closer to such local actors, learn from their examples and support their efforts. And that is why the Special Representative has been advocating a policy of “Go women, go children, go local”.

Notes