

Statement by H.E. Mr. Rytis Paulauskas Permanent Representative of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Nations at the United Nations Security Council High-level Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

New York, 19 July 2022

Mr. President,

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement by the European Union and would like to additionally to deliver a statement on its national capacity.

Lithuania would like to thank the Brazilian Presidency of the Security Council for organizing this very important debate. We would also like to express our appreciation to Special Representative Ms. Virginia Gamba and to the Executive Director of UNICEF Ms. Catherine Russell for their presentations, special thanks to Mr. Patrick Kumi for his powerful story.

The recent annual report of the Secretary General on children and armed conflict reveals the unacceptable – nearly 20 thousand children were affected by grave violations during the reporting period of 2021. We witnessed how cross-border conflicts and intercommunal violence affected children, particularly in central Sahel and Lake Chad basin regions, we also witnessed how coups and takeovers aggravated already difficult situation of children in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Myanmar and the Sudan. We all know that the impacts of armed conflict and violence are particularly devastating for children, with *inter alia* interruptions to education and health services and heightened risk of conflict-related sexual violence. During the reporting period, the scale and severity of grave violations against children remained very concerning, including increased number of recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict. In particular, Lithuania is appalled with the fact that this year once again, two violations showed a sharp increase: abduction, and rape and other forms of sexual violence both rising tragically by 20%. This is utterly disturbing, especially having in mind that sexual violence cases are usually greatly underreported. Children with disabilities and displaced children were particularly vulnerable.

We are extremely concerned by the fact that the report next year will be even worse, and the number of children suffering from armed conflicts will clearly grow. As already indicated in the SG's report, the high intensity of Russia's war in Ukraine will be added to the list of situations of concern. Since Russia launched its illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable aggression against

Ukraine - we witnessed that children are not exempted from being killed, injured or forced to flee. As UNICEF has stated - at least two children have been killed every day with many more injured. According to the OHCHR – more than 300 children have been killed with another 500 children injured, mostly due to the use of explosives in built-up, urban areas. Nearly for 5 months, Russia's armed forces are continuously attacking Ukrainian cities, intentionally targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, killing and injuring thousands of civilians, including children. Russia must stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and attacks on civilian infrastructure. We are very concerned about the growing evidence of violence perpetrated by Russian military forces, including sexual violence, against children. Lithuania is, therefore, hoping that all of the violations against children by Russia will be duly documented and reflected in the next year's report.

Lithuania is very concerned about the reports that Russia is modifying its existing legislation to facilitate a fast-track and simplified adoption procedures for forcibly transferred and evacuated Ukrainian children in Russia. Let me reiterate that UNICEF is of the view that that adoption should never occur during or immediately after emergencies. Children separated from their parents during a humanitarian emergency cannot be assumed to be orphans, and Russian Federation must ensure that the family reunification and best interests of the child would be the guiding principles. Unlawful transfer, deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children during and right after the war may constitute a breach of international law, including UN Convention on Rights of the Child Moreover, IV Geneva Convention. Moreover, forcibly transferring children of one national group to another group is mentioned as one of the criteria in the Convention of Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, thus can be seen as a genocidal method.

We urge Russia to unconditionally withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine. Lithuania strongly condemns Russia for all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including war crimes. Lithuania urges all parties of armed conflicts, state and non-state alike, to end all violations against children and fully implement international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. All atrocities and all violations must be thoroughly investigated, and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

Last year in Lithuanian statement we said that the report of 2020 should be a wake-up call and that responsibility of protecting children, their dreams and their tomorrow lies on our shoulders. We are clearly failing to our commitments, as we are forced to add new armed conflicts to the list of children sufferings.