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**Remarks by Ambassador Mr. Abdou Abarry
Permanent Representative of Niger to the UN**

United Nations Security Council Arria Formula Meeting

**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against
children in situations of armed conflict**

New York, 07 May 2021

Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

It is clear what the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, and not least for children in situations of armed conflict.

Addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflict is, therefore, particularly salient in the context of this pandemic. Children in already dire situation now face even more acute difficulties in all aspects of their lives, well-being, protection, mental health, and access to education.

We commend the office of the Special representative on children and armed conflict for this important study and the UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) as well as local actors that continued the work of monitoring and reporting despite the challenging circumstances. We also thank Estonia and all co-sponsors for convening today's Arria meeting.

Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

The pandemic has further pushed under the shadow grave violations against children that we know were already underreported, due to their particularly sensitive nature, namely rape and sexual violence, recruitment and use, and abductions.

Additionally, as all briefers have underscored, the MRM systems were severely affected due to measures implemented to combat the pandemic. Children in armed conflict, as a result, face compounded degrees of marginalization and vulnerability: they are deprived of essential protection services, often insufficient, just as violations increase, subjected to violations, and for some, they are confined and trapped in unsafe spaces.

With the acute economic precarity that many households experience, we fear an increase in violations such as child labor, re-recruitment,

child marriage with its impact on access to education, particularly for young girls who, in armed conflict situations, are less likely to return to school following school closures.

We wish to further emphasize the importance of the PRST on attacks against schools, adopted last September during Niger's presidency of the Security Council, and of the Safe Schools Declaration as an important instrument for the protection of education in armed conflict.

Niger underscores the need to further pay attention to the breadth and depth of these violations – the trends in the number of children facing violations but also how every affected child may experience varying degrees of violations.

Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

We cannot afford to fail children especially those in armed conflict settings who find themselves in dire situations, for no doing of their own. We share the concerns about the medium- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on violations against children.

To this effect, my delegation wishes to make the following recommendations:

1. There is need to establish and strengthen monitoring networks in communities and ensure good internet connectivity in order to facilitate swift reporting. While it is established that no technology can replace the critical in-person visits for some aspects of verification, technology can play a role in mitigating the effects of potential disruptions.
2. We underscore the need to increase human and financial resources to child protection in situations of armed conflict. Several missions

and situations of concern suffer from understaffing in the area of child protection, and child protection is often the first area to suffer cuts in times of budgetary austerity. These concerns increase today with the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. More than ever before, it is critical to strengthen prevention and early warning systems. This entails paying particular attention to regions where grave violations against children are on the rise. We emphasize the importance of working across sectors and integrating an understanding of how the multiple intersecting crises exacerbate vulnerabilities, as some briefers have rightly noted.
4. We insist on the continuation of comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs, that are gendered sensitive, for children formerly associated with armed groups including education support and training. Children formerly associated with armed groups face a great risk of relapse and of being doubly victimized anytime essential protection services are interrupted.
5. It is clear the findings presented today that, there is need for a follow-up study that would assess the impact of COVID19 on the MRM systems. We recommend an assessment that goes beyond a geographical focus to account for situations of heightened vulnerability such as that of forcibly displaced children, refugees, and children undergoing reintegration processes.
6. In the context of current surges in infection and deaths in many parts of the world, we call on the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2565 to facilitate equitable and affordable access to COVID19 vaccines in armed conflict situations, post-conflict situations and complex humanitarian emergencies. The announcement by the United States to wave vaccine patents is noteworthy, and will certainly accelerate, as resolution 2565 stipulates, the scaling up the manufacturing and distribution

capabilities in various parts of the world. This is not only a measure to face today's challenges, but it would prepare our global community to prevent the next pandemic.

The current health crisis has already become a child rights crisis for too many. When health systems collapse on such a massive scale so do protection mechanisms and many other prevention measures. The suspension of key vaccination campaigns may lead to the emergence of preventable diseases with consequences on children.

7. Lastly, **Colleagues**, Niger firmly believes that there is the need to respect and uphold the fundamental rights for access to education of all children – as a pillar of conflict prevention but also because it is simply the right, just, and human thing to do. There is no substitute to access to quality education especially for children in armed conflict. This can open doors of learning, opportunities, and hope of a better future.

To conclude, we pay tribute to child protection actors working under challenging circumstances to complement the important work to ensure that children in situations of armed conflict receive the care and protection that they need.

I thank you for your attention.