OSCE Group of Friends CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

**STATEMENT OF THE OSCE GROUP OF FRIENDS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT AT THE 1480th MEETING OF OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL "ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT (19 JUNE)"**

**Vienna, 5 July 2024**

Madam Chair,

I'm delivering this statement on behalf of Albania, Belgium, Norway, Poland and my own country Italy, as co-chairs of the OSCE Group of Friends on children and armed conflict.

On the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, we would like to recall that sexual violence against children during conflict is one of the six grave violations of applicable international law which have been identified and condemned by the UN Security Council.

In his latest annual report, which was officially presented to the UN Security Council on 26 June, the UN Secretary General notes that "in 2023 violence against children in armed conflict reached extreme levels, with a shocking 21 per cent increase in grave violations" as a result of multiplying and escalating crises worldwide, including in the OSCE region and at its borders, such as in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Gaza. This is the highest number of grave violations monitored and verified by the United Nations in the last twenty-five years, since the first such report was published.

"Verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated against children [worldwide] increased by 25 per cent [in 2023 and amounted to 1,470], which is particularly concerning, as such violence continues to be vastly underreported owing to stigmatization, the fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, the absence of or lack of access to services, impunity and safety concerns."

The report also confirms that girls continue to experience a disproportionately higher incidence of conflict-related sexual violence and are often victims of multiple

grave violations, since they are also recruited or abducted for sexual violence purposes. Yet, it should not be forgotten that boys are also victims of sexual violence in conflict and, while underreporting remains a general problem, more work is needed to better understand the specific vulnerabilities of all children victims of sexual violence in conflict.

Madam Chair,

the observance of International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict should strengthen our common resolve to end sexual violence in conflict and support survivors. The effective protection of children in armed conflict should be regarded as a crucial aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflicts and should therefore remain our priority, including at the OSCE.

Thank you.