

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict
Wednesday, 16th June 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations

At the outset, I wish to welcome you, Madame President, and I also would like to thank Ambassador Heller and the Mission team for their excellent work in preparation of this important debate.

Austria aligns herself with the statement to be made later by the European Union. As a Member of the Human Security Network, as well as of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, Austria also supports the joint statement of the Network to be delivered by Costa Rica and the first ever joint statement of the Group of Friends to be delivered by Canada.

I wish to thank SRSG Coomaraswamy, Deputy Executive Director Johnson and ASG Khare for their presentations. We highly appreciate the work of the SRSG and all those who contribute to implementing the children and armed conflict agenda within the Secretariat and in UNICEF. My delegation and I personally also wish to extend a warm welcome to Ms. Manju Gurung from Nepal. We thank her for having shared her thoughts and her very moving experiences, which serve as a stark reminder of why we are here today. We welcome the signing of an action plan by the parties in Nepal and the swift completion of the discharge process. The successful mission of SRSG Coomaraswamy to Nepal last December underlines the importance of her field visits for an effective follow-up on the recommendations of the Security Council and its Working Group. __Progress has been made in the past year also in other parts of the world, as set out in the Secretary-General's most recent annual report. We welcome the signing of action plans to halt and prevent the recruitment and use of children with parties in the Philippines and the Sudan, as well as the positive developments in Burundi, which allowed for the de-listing of the armed groups formerly listed under that country situation.

At the same time, the fact that parties to armed conflict have continued to commit grave violations and abuses against children in conflict situations around the world is deeply worrying. We take note of new listings of parties that recruit and use children and engage in patterns of killing and maiming or sexual violence. We call on all parties listed in the annexes immediately to halt those violations and to prepare and implement concrete, time-bound action plans to ensure the effective protection of children. We agree with the Secretary-General that direct contact between the United Nations country teams and non-State actors is important in this context. We therefore support his call on Member States to allow for such contacts in the framework of Resolutions 1539, 1612 and 1882.

The reported increase in attacks against schools, as well as teachers and students, and the specific targeting of girl students in certain country situations, is a deeply worrying development. We strongly condemn such heinous acts, which violate international humanitarian law and deprive the children of any meaningful prospects for a better future.

We wish to acknowledge the detailed information provided in the Secretary-General's report on the criteria and procedures used for listing and de-listing parties to armed conflict as well as the ongoing development of templates for action plans to address and prevent patterns of killing and maiming and/or rape and other sexual violence against children. We agree with the Secretary-General's understanding of the notion of a "pattern", which involves a "multiple commission of acts being perpetrated in the same context", but also wish to stress that this from our point of view should not necessarily imply a high quantitative threshold.

With the introduction of new listing criteria in Resolution 1882 the provision of timely, accurate, reliable and verifiable information to the Council, and thus an increased monitoring and reporting capacity of the UN system, has become even more important. We call, therefore, on all relevant UN entities to cooperate and coordinate in order to create synergies and to allow for the systematic exchange of information. We also believe that in certain situations – such as the case of the Lord's Resistance Army - regional cooperation among UN actors in the field needs to be strengthened.

The report of the Secretary-General rightly draws our attention to those parties to conflict that continue to commit crimes against children, despite repeated calls of the Council. The Council must be determined to ensure respect for its

resolutions and needs to be prepared to take vigorous measures against persistent perpetrators.

In order to increase the coherence of the Council's work, provisions pertaining to violations of international law committed against children should be included in the mandates of the relevant sanctions committees. Interaction of the SRSG and the Working Group with sanctions committees and their expert groups should be enhanced. The recent briefing by SRSG Coomaraswamy to the DRC Sanctions Committee, which included provision of specific information on individuals recruiting and using children, was an important first step. In this context we also support the Secretary General's recommendation to incorporate child protection expertise in sanctions committees' expert groups. At the same time, the Council must also consider specific recommendations from its Working Group on parties committing violations and abuses against children, in order to take direct action in particularly serious situations, where no sanctions committee is in place.

We welcome the fact that the PRST to be adopted at the end of this debate addresses these issues in a very forward-looking manner.

In closing, let me express my country's sincere appreciation for the excellent work that has been carried out by the Mexican Chair of the Working Group over the past one-and-a-half years. The Group has been doing important work in developing concrete recommendations on various situations on the basis of country-specific reports of the Secretary-General and exchanges with the Member States concerned. In view of the considerable workload, as well as the urgent need to build up a historical memory, Austria strongly supports the repeated request to the Secretary-General to provide administrative support to the Group. This could also enable the Group to further improve its working methods and the follow-up of its conclusions and recommendations as well as to proceed to a more effective use of its toolkit, in particular through the timely realization of a field visit.