

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict
18th June 2015, Security Council Chamber

Statement made by Gillian Bird, Representative of Australia to the United Nations

Ms. Bird (Australia): Thank you, Madam President, for convening this important debate. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Special Representative Leila Zerrougui for their efforts to give prominence to the rights and protection of girls and boys affected by armed conflict.

The profound interest we all share in protecting the world's most vulnerable citizens, our children, is evidenced by the fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ratified international human rights treaty in history. Yet still, in conflicts today, children are consistently victimized and denied their most basic protections. For example, in South Sudan, the future of a generation of children is being jeopardized by worsening fighting and severe food insecurity caused by gross political self-interest. Through resolution 2206 (2015), the Security Council established a mechanism to impose discipline on the peace talks through the use of targeted sanctions.

But with no sign that either party is genuinely committed to peace, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) should immediately list individuals and entities whose actions target civilians in South Sudan, particularly children. South Sudan is reliant on its children growing up safely and with hope for the future.

We must do more to compel non-State actors to live up to their obligations to protect children in conflict situations. In their persistent targeting of children, barbarous groups such as Daesh and Boko Haram have demonstrated that their actions are bereft of humanity. Both groups have engaged in systematic child abduction — a heinous crime used to humiliate, suppress and terrorize civilians. Abduction during armed conflict is a serious breach of the rights of children, and the consequences are dire. They can amount to additional crimes: we know that thousands of children have been snatched from their families and forced to be soldiers, sold as sexual slaves, exploited as human shields or as unwitting suicide bombers.

It is for those reasons that the Council has listed child abduction among the six grave violations against children during armed conflict. As we mark the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), we welcome the Council's decision today to include abductions as a trigger for the inclusion of parties into the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2015/409).

Australia commends the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We encourage the Group to engage directly with peacekeeping mission leadership — as it did for the first time last year with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan — and to better understand contemporary challenges on the ground.

In United Nations peacekeeping missions, there must be situation-specific training for all peacekeeping personnel, including military and police, to address the full range of grave violations against children, including abductions. The international community must do more to prevent grave violations against children and to end impunity. Condemnation is not enough. Australia joins others in endorsing Malaysia's Children in Armed Conflict Accountability Framework as a practical resource that can guide States in introducing accountability measures at the local, national, regional and international levels.

As the preamble to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child states, "Mankind owes to the children the best it has to give". That is as true in times of conflict as it is in times of peace. We welcome the Security Council's continued interest in this most important issue.