

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

Statement made by Aguilar Patriota, Representative of Brazil to the United Nations

Let me express the appreciation of the Brazilian delegation to you, Mr. President, for presiding over this meeting and for convening this very important debate. I am also grateful to the Secretary-General, to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui, to UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Yoka Brandt and to Ms. Eunice Apio for their briefings.

While the Security Council framework for the protection of children affected by armed conflict has been decisively reinforced since the turn of the twenty-first century, more needs to be done in terms of implementation and accountability. Every year, thousands of vulnerable and innocent girls and boys still bear the brunt of wars fought by adults. Brazil resolutely condemns all acts of violence against children in situations of armed conflict and expects all violators to be brought to justice. We are particularly concerned by the alarming reports that certain parties that have committed serious violations against girls and boys in the context of war may have been omitted from the lists in the annex to the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) as a consequence of what many would consider undue political pressure. It is of paramount importance that the Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict be allowed to exercise its responsibilities with independence and objectivity, free from politicization and within the mandate established by the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The abduction of innocent children during armed conflicts is often linked to some of the worst humanrights abuses, including sexual slavery, enslavement, hostage-taking, enforced disappearances, forcible population transfers and child recruitment. Those violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity under the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court. They are also tragically frequent. Let me recall that over 24,000 child abductions during conflicts have been reported since 2002. While the crime of abduction is already proscribed under international humanitarian and human-rights law and has been included among the six grave violations against children established by the Council, we believe there is still room for strengthening our legal and political framework to tackle serious violations.

Mrs. Adnin took the Chair.

Brazil therefore supports the inclusion of child abduction among the listing criteria for the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. That would send a strong signal to all would-be perpetrators that abducting girls and boys is unacceptable conduct under any circumstance. We expect this issue to be addressed in all future action plans aimed at preventing violence against children to be signed by the parties in a conflict situation.

An area in which we are achieving progress, notwithstanding recent tragic and alarming cases, is the imperative to prevent attacks against educational facilities, as well as their use for military purposes. Brazil was pleased to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, signed in Oslo last month, in which 38 countries agreed to abide by the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

As we discuss practical ways to further develop our legal tools to protect children from the impact of war, allow me to recall the essential distinction between armed conflicts, on the one hand, and situations of domestic law enforcement, on the other. While both 34/96 15-18380 S/PV.7466 Children and armed conflict 18/06/2015 categories are considered in detail in the annual report, they should not be amalgamated in any way, because they pertain to different domains. Armed conflicts and situations that represent a threat to international peace and security, as established by the Council, are subject to the norms of international humanitarian law, such as the obligation on all parties to protect civilians, including girls and boys. Issues of internal law enforcement, however, fall clearly outside the purview of the Security Council and should be tackled by Governments through national legislation and international cooperation, with international humanrights law — including the Convention on the Rights of the Child — as the paradigm to be followed.

Like others who spoke before me, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict herself in her statement today, I would like to mention Colombia, the only Latin American country to be referred to in the annual report. We believe that Colombia's efforts to develop policies to protect children in armed conflict while at the same time conducting peace negotiations should be acknowledged by the United Nations and, perhaps, better reflected in future reports.

The five most deadly conflicts for children in 2014, according to the annual report, were those of Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Darfur. There is an underlying pattern in that dismal list. Most of those hostilities could have been avoided through inclusive dialogue, peaceful negotiations, good offices and other diplomatic measures. Conflict prevention remains the most ethical and effective approach to shielding all civilians, including children, from the plight of war. Conversely, inconsistent strategies that prioritize the use of force tend to aggravate the suffering of those whom we ought to protect. That reasoning is also relevant to our joint efforts against terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. We believe that the international community should focus its efforts on addressing the root causes that lead to the emergence of such extremist groups.

We agree with the Secretary-General's assessment that:

“Recognizing and addressing social deprivation and alienation of communities, strengthening efforts to grant access to education and other key social services will contribute to isolating the leaders of extremist groups through delegitimizing their discourse and reducing the numbers who willingly enlist.” (S/2015/409, para. 16)

The Peacebuilding Commission can play a key role in promoting policies in countries emerging from conflict so as to foster social cohesion and thereby render children and youth less vulnerable to recruitment and abuse, including by terrorist groups.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate my country's enduring commitment to the advancement of the children and armed conflict agenda in the Security Council and also to the wider debate, in various forums, on the protection of all girls and boys who suffer from violence and abuse. This crosscutting concern must be at the heart of all activities and endeavours of the United Nations.