

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

Statement made by Guillermo Rishchynski, Representative of Canada to the United Nations

(Spoke in French): I would like to begin by thanking the Malaysian presidency for enabling us to participate in this debate on children and armed conflict.

(Spoke in English): In the past year we have seen horrific situations in armed conflict in which children have been primary targets, particularly for violent extremists, with abductions, recruitment and the use of child soldiers in active hostilities and the violent radicalization of youth, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse which, as we note with great concern and dismay, has sometimes been perpetrated by personnel attached to peace support operations.

The international community was horrified by Boko Haram's abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Nigeria in the spring of last year. Less well known but also deplorable were the abductions by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria of 153 Kurdish boys in Syria and hundreds of Yazidi children in western Iraq, as well as the case of 89 schoolboys kidnapped in South Sudan. While mass abductions draw the media limelight, hundreds of children have been abducted by such groups both before and since those events. Canada strongly condemns the abductions and calls for the immediate release of all abducted children without delay. The international community must work to ensure that the children receive the support they require and are reunited with their families immediately.

(Spoke in French): Sadly, abductions are often simply the precursors to other grave violations such as forced recruitment, forced conversion and sexual violence. They have especially horrible consequences for girls, who are exposed to sexual violence, slavery and forced marriage, as well as forced recruitment. Furthermore, they face difficulties once they are released, since they are often the victims of social stigmatization that hinders their reintegration into their communities.

We are horrified that armed groups are abducting children from schools. When parents fear that their children might be abducted, they are less likely to send them to school, and the repercussions of that decision are particularly hard on girls. This is very worrying, given the fact that education is a very powerful tool for ensuring the achievement of many development goals, including improved maternal, newborn and child health and the eradication of child, early and forced marriage.

(Spoke in English): Canada condemns the unlawful use of schools by armed parties for military purposes. We call on all parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law and refrain from using schools as bases, barracks, weapons caches or detention centres. 15-18380 59/96 18/06/2015 Children and armed conflict S/PV.7466 We urge Member States to undertake preventive measures to guard against children's abductions. We must hold those who commit abductions to account, and ensure safe conditions for children who are released. We therefore welcome the adoption today of resolution 2225 (2015), on abductions, of which Canada was honoured to be a sponsor.

Ten years ago, the international community established the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, designed to systematically monitor, document and report on such violations. Canada is proud to have supported that initiative, and while the problem is far from solved, we have seen some small glimmers of hope. This year saw the delisting of Chad, a decline of violations in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and the release of hundreds of child soldiers.

(Spoke in French): Canada was deeply saddened to learn that many children, both Israeli and Palestinian, were injured and killed during the conflict that erupted in Gaza in the summer of 2014, for which Hamas is solely responsible. As the Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2015/409), the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian armed groups from populated areas endangered civilian populations in both Israel and Gaza and led to deaths and injuries among children.

Canada is disappointed, however, that in his report, rather than calling on all parties to take steps to protect children affected by armed conflict, the Secretary-General demonstrates an overt bias in singling out Israel for one-sided and disproportionate criticism. The fact that 32 paragraphs in the report are devoted to Israel — giving it far more attention than any other Member State, including Syria, the Central African Republic and the Sudan — speaks to the need to provide a more honest, impartial and balanced view of the situation on the ground than the one in this document. This biased view undermines the integrity of such an important document. Moreover, the United Nations should better

address the significant underreporting of the deaths of children in situations such as in Syria, so that Member States can have an accurate view of the effects on children of that deadly conflict.

(Spoke in English): Any sexual abuse or exploitation is simply unacceptable. With regard to today's debate, however, we would like to shine a spotlight on the heinous practice of targeting children. Canada condemns in the strongest terms all forms of sexual abuse or exploitation of children by any party to a conflict. Our country is committed to ensuring that the rights of children are protected in all settings, particularly in situations of armed conflict. I would like to assure the Council that we will continue to work with all members of the international community to ensure that all children, all over the world, have safe spaces in which to grow and learn. That is our duty and our responsibility.