

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

Statement made by Christian Wenaweser, Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations

We welcome this debate and extend a special welcome to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, who is with us throughout the debate today. We very much appreciate and value her work and the work of her Office.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) once again shines a light on the many ways in which children are affected by armed conflict, on the increasing number of horrendous crimes committed against them and on the perpetrators of this violence. We support many of the recommendations in the report, in particular the one on the need to include abductions of children as a trigger mechanism for listing. My brief intervention will focus on three points today.

First, we are pleased to see a strong call for accountability among the recommendations. It is of the utmost importance to demand full respect for international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. We are concerned about the sexual exploitation and abuse case in the Central African Republic and the systemic weaknesses within the United Nations system it has brought to light. We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to establish an independent investigation and look forward to its results. Thirty per cent of the victims of reported cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Haiti, Liberia, South Sudan 15-18380 43/96 18/06/2015 Children and armed conflict S/PV.7466 and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were minors. The United Nations proclaimed zero-tolerance policy will be ineffective as long as accountability mechanisms remain opaque or simply not in place and reporting remains difficult or even dangerous.

The challenges in ensuring accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse have been discussed for many years, but with few tangible results. There is a persistent danger that the important work of so many could be publicly discredited owing to the unethical and criminal acts committed with impunity by a few. Troop-contributing countries have to ensure speedy domestic investigations and prosecutions for violations committed by their nationals. Otherwise, the United Nations role and its crucial function in the area of peacekeeping will be compromised.

Secondly, the list of perpetrators in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports can be a very powerful tool to influence the behaviour of parties to a conflict. However, for this to be the case, the listing and delisting process needs to be fair, consistent and transparent. The vast majority of parties listed are non-State actors, with whom it can be difficult to engage. The International Committee of the Red Cross and certain non-governmental organizations, such as Geneva Call, are uniquely positioned in that regard, and their experience should inform the Council's work in this area.

Some parties to conflicts seem to have made clear commitments to engage, are eager to cooperate and have signed so called deeds of commitment to stop violations against children. Nevertheless, not a single non-State actor/entity has been able to qualify for delisting so far, due, inter alia, to a lack of knowledge and assistance throughout the process. This has caused frustration and is also a missed opportunity to motivate other non-State actors to cooperate with a view to delisting. It is therefore important to support organizations that assist non-State actors in their efforts to achieve delisting. We as Governments can further facilitate such processes through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which creates the necessary framework for engagement.

Finally, I would like to briefly touch upon the issue of underage foreign terrorist fighters. We are obviously struggling to find a response to this complex phenomenon. Our knowledge of the root causes, motivation and recruitment policies and processes is still limited. We must not forget in this discussion that we are talking about children, whose judgment and resulting behaviour is that of legal minors. We therefore look forward with great interest at so-called soft-handed approaches based on the assumption that poverty, discrimination, lack of socialization and the absence of effective integration are often at the root of radicalization. Instead of an exclusive focus on criminalization, those strategies make use of psychosocial counselling and help returnees find jobs or education opportunities. We do not claim to know that one approach works better than another, but we certainly see value in exploring a stronger focus on reintegration. What seems to be clear is that a comprehensive response is needed that covers prevention, psycho-social support and integration assistance to complement necessary legal measures and action.

In conclusion, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the Safe Schools Declaration, which endorses the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. We welcome that elaboration on existing international humanitarian law and call upon others to join those of us that have already endorsed the Guidelines at the recently held safe schools conference in Oslo.