

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

Statement by Ambassador McLay, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations

New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to contribute today. We thank the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2010/181), Radhika Coomaraswamy for the outstanding role she continues to play as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mexico for its long and commendable history of promoting the issue of children in armed conflict, including by having convened today's debate.

As we sit in the comfort of this Chamber, it is nearing 9 p.m. in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 11 p.m. in the Sudan and 3 a.m. in Myanmar. And as we speak, in such places and elsewhere, children are being handed guns and told to fight, suffering the vilest forms of sexual assault, abuse and rape, or are being disfigured, maimed or even murdered.

Member States, the various organs of the United Nations and the Security Council all have a vital role to play in protecting such children, and there has been some progress on that. For example, New Zealand welcomes the efforts of those countries that have been de-listed from the annexes of the Secretary-General's report and of others that have committed to action plans. We also welcome the fact that child protection enjoys a high profile on the Council's agenda.

However, while there has been progress, much remains to be done. In the interests of time, I will highlight just four recommendations that New Zealand considers important.

First, while we welcome their highlighted listing in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2010/181), it is distressing that there are still 16 parties that, in that context, have recruited, maimed, killed, raped or sexually violated children for at least five years. Those parties are ignoring international law, as well as Council resolutions, presidential statements and conclusions, and more needs to be done to hold them accountable. In line with the Secretary-General's recommendations, we encourage the Council to include the recruitment and use of children in the mandates of its sanctions committees; to ensure that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is asked to brief those committees more regularly; and to prioritize persistent violators on its agenda. We encourage the Council to refer persistent violators to existing sanctions committees and to consider other targeted measures where no sanctions committee exists.

Secondly, we urge those countries concerned to allow United Nations contact teams to meet with non-State armed groups to enable them to prepare action plans and carry out other protection measures. And we ask the Council to take a more active role to ensure that contact. We note, for example, that Government restrictions prevent the United Nations country team in Myanmar from contacting non-State armed groups. That greatly hinders its monitoring and verification activities and means that action plans cannot be concluded.

Thirdly, New Zealand advocates the Security Council's taking a more active role to ensure that parties listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports develop and execute action plans with clear timelines. The Council should ensure that any non-compliance with those plans is promptly dealt with, using the full range of tools at the disposal of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Fourthly, there has been a disturbing increase in the number of politically and ideologically motivated attacks on and threats to teachers, students and educational facilities. We call on the Security Council, in line with international law and its presidential statement of 29 April last year (S/PRST/2009/9), to take a more active role in bringing those violations to an end. One possible step could be for country task forces of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to improve the level of information in their reports on the motivations for and extent of attacks on schools. In his annual and country-specific reports, the Secretary-General could also detail effective strategies for the prevention of such attacks and to improve response and accountability.

Another step could be the more concrete inclusion of child protection, including access to and the quality and political neutrality of education, in future Council outcomes on peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Eventually, the monitoring and reporting mechanism triggers could be expanded to include attacks on schools.

Those are just four steps that could be taken to protect children. There are others, and the ongoing and systematic commitment of the Security Council, Member States, the United Nations and its organs is required to ensure overall action and compliance. In addressing this matter, we should also keep in mind that one of the most effective ways of ensuring the well-being of children is to protect their parents, and that requires the ongoing action of States to protect civilians in armed conflicts, especially women.

In that respect, New Zealand ensures a conflict sensitive approach in its development assistance to the education and health sectors of fragile States, including human rights education; provides support for the elimination of gender-based violence; and works to foster sustainable and equitable economic development. All of this contributes to building a safe environment where parents and children see options for their future beyond the perpetuation of conflict.

I note that, because of insufficient age determination procedures, the Afghan National Police (ANP) is listed in annex I of the Secretary-General's report. New Zealand welcomes the fact that the ANP already has measures in place to verify the minimum age of recruits, and we encourage its ongoing commitment, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report, to additional measures to verify the age of recruits, as the Afghan National Army has already done. We hope that the implementation of such measures will lead to the de-listing of the ANP, and we encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to work closely with the ANP to implement those measures.

Those children in the deserts, jungles and forests of whom I spoke and who, as we speak, are being forced to fight, are being raped, maimed or even murdered are the children that we must think of during this debate. It is our collective duty to protect them.