

Children and Armed Conflict
12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Musayev, Representative of Azerbaijan

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important open debate on children and armed conflict and for the submission of the concept paper (S/2011/409) on this topic.

Azerbaijan aligns itself with the statement delivered today on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks in our national capacity.

We reiterate our commitment to continuing to support the activities of existing United Nations mechanisms and other relevant international actors aimed at ensuring more effective protection for the rights of children and improving the situation of children affected by armed conflict. Azerbaijan's determination with regard to the issue under consideration is obvious and stems from our keen interest to contribute to the achievement of sustainable peace and development and from our practical experience in addressing the impact of armed conflict on civilians, including children.

The war unleashed against our country and the military occupation of our territories have had a considerable impact, inter alia on the humanitarian aspect of the problem, and primarily affect the most vulnerable groups. Azerbaijan continues to suffer from having one of the highest number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, large numbers of whom are children. The most serious crimes of international concern have been committed during the conflict, and even children have not been spared.

In its relevant resolutions adopted in 1993 in response to the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, the Security Council referred specifically to violations of international humanitarian law, including the forced displacement of large numbers of civilians in Azerbaijan. The European Court of Human Rights later arrived at an important conclusion, qualifying the behaviour of those carrying out the incursion into the territory of Azerbaijan as acts of particular gravity that could amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity.

In spite of a formal ceasefire, deliberate attacks by the occupier against Azerbaijani civilians and civilian objects, in contravention of applicable international law, have become more frequent and violent over recent years, resulting in the killing and maiming of many inhabitants residing near the front lines, including children.

The issue of children and armed conflict has been inscribed firmly on the international agenda, and a strong normative framework has been developed. Important steps have been taken to achieve accountability for grave child rights violations. However, serious challenges remain. More resolute and targeted measures are required to protect children in situations of armed conflict and to end impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity and other egregious crimes perpetrated against children. Furthermore, particular consideration should be given to internally displaced children in the context of ensuring their inalienable right of return, and to the implications for the protection of child rights of illegal policies and practices in situations of foreign occupation.

Another challenging issue requiring urgent action is that of children taken hostage and reported missing in connection with armed conflict.

Azerbaijan will continue to contribute to identifying long-term and sustained solutions to this problem and to focusing on the ways and means by which the international community can address existing challenges, including in particular violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict and measures aimed at bringing to justice those responsible for such violations.