

Children and Armed Conflict

12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Mahmood, Permanent Representative to Bangladesh

Mr. Mahmood (Bangladesh): Let me begin by congratulating Germany on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July and for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. I also thank the Foreign Minister of Germany for presiding over this important meeting. And I welcome the presence and statements of Ministers here today as clear testimony to the issue's importance to all of us.

Allow me also to express my country's sincere thanks to the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, for their detailed briefings this morning.

My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his tenth report on the issue, as contained in document S/2011/250. We believe that his recommendations merit careful consideration and subsequent implementation and compliance by Member States and parties to armed conflict. We commend the Security Council for its continued efforts to end violations against children in armed conflict.

These include the Secretary-General's naming-and-shaming list, the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism, action plans, the creation of a Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict through resolution 1612 (2005), the application of sanctions and referrals to the International Criminal Court.

Those initiatives have yielded significant and tangible successes. As reflected in the Secretary-General's report, last year, too, several listed parties to armed conflict signed agreements to adopt action plans to end their recruitment or use of child soldiers. The United Nations system-wide response to this issue is also laudable. In that connection, I take this opportunity to thank UNICEF for its leadership role in the monitoring and reporting mechanism. The Special Representative and her team deserve our particular praise for their dedicated efforts.

While addressing this matter, we must focus a bit more on the supply side of the issue. The use of children by non-State armed groups does not take place in a vacuum. Conditions that might make children in those settings vulnerable to recruitment include poverty, discrimination, inequality, exclusion, hopelessness and desperate situations. They also include a culture of political violence, tensions over issues of religion and identity and a history of the use of child soldiers, all of which combine to create a situation where conflict is possible and where children can be used or abused by armed groups. Success in ending children's involvement in armed conflict therefore depends largely on addressing the root causes of motivation as well as desperation and on building societies where children's rights and dignity and the hope for a better future for all children are upheld.

Needless to say, there is still a long way to go. While progress has been made through action plans to release child soldiers in several situations of concern, the overall situation of children in armed conflict remains grave. There are 61 entities on the lists contained in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report, 16 of which have been listed for at least five years. Some kind of criteria should be contemplated to enforce full compliance by parties listed in the annexes, particularly persistent violators, with time-bound action plans. However, a cautious approach is necessary to ensure that such enforcement in no way risks harming the very vulnerable group that we are addressing here, namely, children.

The issue of child casualties in the course of military operations needs to be appropriately addressed. In line with paragraph 220 of the Secretary-General's report, we hope that all parties in situations of armed conflict will adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

Apart from what I have referred to, in many armed conflicts grave violations are committed against children including, in particular the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence against children, the abduction of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access to children by parties to armed conflict, in contravention of applicable international law. In

that regard, I particularly urge the concerned parties to protect educational and health institutions and related personnel from such attacks. We also welcome the adoption today of resolution 1998 (2011) in this connection.

It has been more than nine years since the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict entered into force. Bangladesh signed and ratified the Optional Protocol on 9 September 2000. However, we note with sadness that a total of 50 Member States are still not party to it. We would like to urge those States to become parties to the Protocol. Children are the future of our world and they bear the torch of the culture of peace. It is our solemn duty to protect their physical safety and their right to live on planet Earth with their minds free of fear and filled with hopes and dreams.