

Children and Armed Conflict

12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Zinsou, Representative of Benin

My country, the Republic of Benin, is pleased to see the Federal Republic of Germany presiding over the Security Council. My delegation noted with great satisfaction the personal contribution of the Secretary-General and of the many representatives of the Governments of States members of the Council to the open debate today.

This debate clearly touches on an extremely sensitive subject in terms of the capacity of the United Nations to fully and effectively shoulder its responsibilities in the promotion of the ideals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in particular in the area of international peace and security and the protection of human rights.

I should like here to state that the Government of Benin is very pleased with the ongoing commitment and commendable dedication shown by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and her team in terms of carrying out their responsibilities with respect to the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. I should like to commend in particular her bravery in visiting dangerous conflict areas to obtain the release of children recruited into and used in armed conflicts.

Benin would also like to encourage the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to work with resolve in cooperation with the United Nations agencies and international civil society actors that are working to protect children and young people in armed conflict.

Benin would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Qatar for its leadership in the context of United Nations efforts to ensure the protection of the right to education in emergency situations.

The adoption in 2010 by the General Assembly of resolution 64/290 represented a significant development in fighting international human rights violations affecting children. It offers hope for the effective achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular in the area of education. In that resolution, the General Assembly unequivocally condemned attacks deliberately targeting civilians in armed conflict, including schoolchildren, students and teachers, as well as attacks against civilian objects, in violation of international law. It also declared that such acts may constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and, for States parties, war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The same is true of attacks against schools and hospitals which should, during times of conflict, be considered as safe havens to ensure their inviolability.

The initiative taken by the Security Council to expand the mandate of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict to include attacks against schools and hospitals and protected persons working there demonstrates that the Council is addressing the concerns clearly expressed by the General Assembly in resolution 64/290 and by the Secretary-General in his latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2011/250). We congratulate the Council for having responded to the call by the Secretary-General that it make greater efforts to ensure that such facilities remain protected, in particular by appealing to all parties to the conflict to respect those essential institutions and their staff and to take all possible measures to protect them and ensure that they can function.

Guaranteeing humanitarian access remains a crucial question. Benin, as the main negotiator of resolution 1612 (2005) and having set up the monitoring and reporting mechanism, welcomes the expansion of its remit to encompass other atrocities affecting children. Benin urges the Security Council to make full use of the instruments available to it so as to ensure the respect of the rights of children caught up in armed conflict or in humanitarian crises.

It is important to step up international cooperation in order to guarantee access by children and young people to the basic services that are key to their well-being by establishing appropriate partnership and assistance programmes at the global, national and local levels. That is why Benin has been actively involved in preparing for the United Nations Highlevel Meeting on Youth, set to take place here in New York in several days to consider the situation of young people and children.

In conclusion, Benin is proud to be a sponsor of the new resolution on children and armed conflict. It supports the measures authorized by the resolution and, over and above that, all efforts undertaken at various levels to bring added pressure to bear on those who remorselessly trample on the rights of children caught up in armed conflict and in political or humanitarian crises.

Benin reiterates its urgent appeal to the international community to work with greater determination to put an end to all conflicts in the world, regardless of their intensity, to promote reconciliation and peacebuilding in the countries affected.