

Security Council Open Debate on Children in Armed Conflict, June 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Doubane, Permanent Mission of the Central African Republic to the United Nations.

Today's agenda item on the plight of children in times of conflict provides me with the opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's accession to the presidency of the Council for this month and to assure you of my delegation's support during your presidency. I take this opportunity to reiterate my gratitude to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Togo, who carried out his work in an exemplary manner last month while presiding over the Council.

I express our gratitude to Luxembourg, represented by Ms. Sylvie Lucas and the Deputy Prime Minister, and which chairs the important Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous, UNICEF and Save the Children, which is indeed doing exemplary work on this issue that is so important for humankind.

The agenda item under discussion today is a crucial issue for us, as it relates to children and the future of humankind and of our shared world, which must be protected from threats, particularly in conflict.

The situation concerning children in the Central African Republic, which improved slightly in 2012, has once again become alarming and even critical since the crisis that led to regime change on 24 March. Indeed, whether it is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), children enrolled in the various rebel groups, or simply those deprived of education because of the war, the children of the Central African Republic are experiencing severe hardships that compromise both their future and their lives.

In the case of the LRA, attacks often target schools, where the rebels recruit children for use as child soldiers or to carry loot and stolen and pillaged items if they are boys or as sex slaves and cooking staff if they are girls. It is the same for other rebel groups, in particular the Séléka, which has recruited children for the same tasks. What is distressing is that even those previously removed from conflict and who have passed through transition centres and returned to their family and social environment are recruited again. These children, including street children in cities, have not been spared forced or voluntary recruitment.

While the proper place for children is and remains in their family, at school, on the playground or at recreation centres, those affected by conflict are enrolled in so-called self-defence militia to protect their village, becoming choice targets in conflict. Those fleeing into the bush with their parents to avoid being killed are exposed to the weather, mosquitoes and wild beasts and risk certain death.

Meanwhile, schools, if they are not destroyed, simply become barracks where tables, benches and textbooks are used for firewood. What kind of a world do we live in? Teachers themselves try to shelter in the bush to save their own lives and those of their family members. This sad picture, as I just said, ruins any hope of building a peaceful country, as its future workforce will not be adequately trained or educated.

The scourge can be contained or ended in the Central African Republic only if we build a State of law that respects and guarantees rights and freedoms, including those of children; create a peaceful environment where families can do their best to create a decent life for themselves with a view to promoting the healthy emotional and physical development of the child; and make school a second venue for socialization, after the family, by ensuring that it remains status-neutral and protected from conflict and that its facilities and property are not occupied, vandalized or destroyed by belligerents;

and only if the State, civil society and non-governmental organizations mobilize financial, human and logistical resources to that end. That is why a reasonable share of the budgets of these moral and physical entities must be set aside and increased each year for children and their development.

The Central African Republic, a fragile country and victim of recurrent conflict, must break the cycle of rebellion if it wishes to build a State of law and effectively preserve its achievements, and do its all to comply with international standards in order to protect children in their lifestyle and environment. That is why we express the desire to strengthen our cooperation with the United Nations, UNICEF and non-governmental organizations involved in the issue in order to find ways and means to eradicate the scourge. If, as the saying goes, “the child is the father of man”, in the future we must spare no effort to protect children if we want this to be a world of peace, security and, above all, development.