

## **Children and Armed Conflict**

**12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber**

### ***Statement by Mr. Serrano, Permanent Representative to the European Union***

Mr. Serrano (European Union): Thank you, Sir, for giving the floor to the European Union and for convening this important debate. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

Like other speakers, I thank Germany for its strong commitment to advancing the approach of the United Nations to the issue of children and armed conflict and the hard work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict under the leadership of Ambassador Wittig. I would also like to recognize Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's personal commitment to this issue and to extend a warm welcome to his Special Representative. The European Union (EU) commends Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy's tireless efforts on behalf of the rights and well-being of children facing armed conflict, and fully supports her mandate and actions. Let me also express our appreciation for UNICEF's contribution to child protection, which the EU supports.

The European Union greatly values the progress made in recent years in creating a strong normative framework for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. We therefore welcome resolution 1998 (2011), adopted this morning, and the expansion of the triggers for listing parties to attacks on schools or hospitals, as well as to attacks or threats of attack against protected persons connected to schools or hospitals, including schoolchildren, patients and education and medical personnel. We look forward to comprehensive implementation of the resolution, including through monitoring by country-level task forces.

The European Union also joins in calls to strengthen accountability and take further decisive action against persistent perpetrators, including through restrictive measures. When establishing or reviewing the mandate of relevant sanctions committees, the Security Council should include grave violations against children as criteria meriting sanctions. We also encourage the Security Council to address accountability gaps where there are no country-specific sanctions regimes, and to deal with violations of applicable international law committed against children in such cases.

The European Union also believes in the importance of investigating, prosecuting and punishing all those who commit grave violations against children. We have stated on numerous occasions that every effort must be made to end the culture of impunity, including through the International Criminal Court and other international criminal tribunals, which play a key role in ensuring accountability in cases where a State is unwilling or unable to fulfil its responsibilities. We would like to recall here that children are specially protected by the Rome Statute. We welcome the work of the International Criminal Court in this field, of which the ongoing trial of Thomas Lubanga for war crimes is the first example.

Many in this Chamber today have highlighted the crucial importance of decisive and comprehensive implementation of our commitments. I would like to use this occasion to update the Security Council on recent steps taken by the European Union to enhance its contribution to the work of protecting, rehabilitating and empowering children — objectives that have been high on its foreign policy, development and humanitarian agenda for a number of years. I am happy to report that, since December 2010, the European Union has worked with a revised implementation strategy for the EU guidelines on children and armed conflict.

European Union action in this area is firmly based on Security Council resolutions and the Paris Principles, and fully aligned with United Nations priorities. In that context, I would like to highlight that the EU guidelines pay particular attention to the situation and specific needs of girls in and after armed conflict. The European Union has stepped up political advocacy and public diplomacy. For instance, we continue to support the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as also promoted by the Special Representative in cooperation with other partners.

On this year's International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, the African Union and the European Union have jointly called for the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa and Europe and for the strengthening of efforts at all levels to prevent conflicts and protect children from the effects of war, including from being forced to serve as combatants, sex slaves or servants.

The European Union has made further improvements in mainstreaming. We now include new standard language on human rights, gender and child protection in all relevant mandates of European Union special representatives. We have started to develop training modules for our crisis management experts and enhanced human rights training for European Union diplomats, including for officials on postings in EU delegations around the world, who should soon act as children and armed conflict focal points.

Moreover, on the basis of its human rights guidelines and as a measure of practical support to the implementation of the country-specific conclusions and recommendations of the Security Council Working Group, the European Union has funded numerous projects to support protection and rehabilitation for children in post-conflict situations.

The European Union has enhanced its practical cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative and with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, in view of its crucial role in mainstreaming protection issues within peacekeeping missions. We look forward to further intensifying our collaboration with the United Nations to the benefit of children affected by armed conflict, including with United Nations country teams in the field. In conclusion, my thanks go out to all who work on this noble cause on a daily basis, often in difficult situations.